THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/weaversweftother00brad

WEAVERS AND WEFT

And other Tales

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET'

ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

LONDON
JOHN MAXWELL AND CO.
4, SHOE LANE, FLEET STREET
1877
[*All rights reserved.*]

PR
4989
M33v
1877

CONTENTS TO VOL. I.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	At the 'Star and Garter'	1
II.	'When We Two Parted'	19
III.	'It was thine Oath that first did fail'	36
IV.	'Offend her, and she knows not to forgive'	54
V.	'Time is, Time was'	71
VI.	'Arise, black Vengeance, from thy hollow cell'	80
VII.	'Green-eyed Jealousy'	95
VIII.	Had you loved me once as you have not loved!'	108
IX.	The Beginning of Sorrow	122
X.	The Cruel River	141
XI.	Getting over it	152
XII.	'The Shackles of an Old Love straiten'd him'	168
XIII.	'At Merlin's Feet the wily Vivien lay'	180
XIV.	Sir Cyprian has his Suspicions	193
XV.	'They live too long who Happiness outlive'	203
XVI.	'Grief fills the room up of my absent Child'	220
XVII.	A Balcony Scene	232
XVIII.	Cyprian's Visitor	243
XIX.	Mrs. Walsingham breaks Faith	254
XX.	Dr. Hollendorf	267
XXI.	A Rapid Thaw	292
XXII.	Kill or Cure	308

106147

WEAVERS AND WEFT.

CHAPTER I.

AT THE 'STAR AND GARTER.'

Glorious June weather, tender moonlight, from a moon newly risen; silvery on far-off glimpses of the winding river; soft and mysterious where it falls upon the growing darkness of the woodland; a pensive light, by which men, not altogether given up to the world, are apt to ponder the deeper enigmas of this life, and to look backward, Heaven knows with what keen agonies of regret, to youth that has vanished, and friends that are dead.

Two men, who have been dining at the 'Star and Garter,' and who have stolen away from the dessert to

smoke their cigars under the midsummer moon, contemplate the familiar landscape in a lazy meditative silence. One is sitting on the stone balustrade of the terrace, with his face turned to the distant curve of the river, watching the tender light with a sombre expression of countenance; the other stands with his elbows resting on the balustrade, smoking industriously, and looking every now and then with rather an uneasy glance at his companion.

The first is Sir Cyprian Davenant, the last scion of a good old Kentish family, and owner of one of the finest and oldest places in the county of Kent. The Davenants have been a wild and reckless set for the last hundred years, and there is not an acre of Davenant Park or a tree in Davenant woods unencumbered by mortgage. How Sir Cyprian lives and contrives to keep out of debt is a subject for the wonder of his numerous acquaintances. His intimate friends know that the man has few expensive habits, and that he has a small income from an estate inherited from his mother.

Sir Cyprian's companion is a man approaching middle age, with a decidedly plain face, redeemed

from ugliness by a certain vivacity of expression about the mouth and eyes. This gentleman is James Morton Wyatt, a solicitor, with an excellent practice, and a decided taste for literature and art, which he is rich enough to be able to cultivate at his leisure, leaving the ordinary run of cases to the care of his junior partner, and only putting in an appearance at his office when an affair of some importance is on hand. James Wyatt is a bachelor, and a great favourite with the fair sex, for whom his fashionable modern cynicism seems to possess an extraordinary charm. The cynic has a natural genius for the art of flattery, and a certain subtle power of pleasing that surprises his male acquaintance, who wonder what the women can see in this fellow, with his long, mean-looking nose, small gray eyes, and incessant flow of shallow talk.

'You're not very lively company to-night, Davenant,' James Wyatt said at last. 'I've been waiting with exemplary patience for some kind of reply to the question I asked you about a quarter of an hour ago.'

'You can scarcely expect much liveliness from a

man who is going to start for Africa in four-and-twenty hours, with a very vague prospect of coming back again.'

'Well, I don't know about that. It's a pleasure trip, isn't it, this African exploration business?'

'It is to be called pleasure, I believe. My share in it would never have come about but for a promise to an old friend. It is a point of honour with me to go. The promise was given five or six years ago, when I was hot upon the subject. I expect very little enjoyment from the business now, but I am bound to go.'

He sighed as he said this, still looking far away at the winding river, with the same gloomy expression in his eyes. It was a face not easily forgotten by those who had once looked upon it, a face of remarkable beauty, a little wan and faded by the cares and dissipations of a career that had been far from perfect. Cyprian Davenant was not quite five-and-thirty, but he had lived at a high pressure rate for ten years of his life, and bore the traces of the fray. The perfect profile, the broad low brow, and deep dark eyes had not lost much in

losing the freshness of youth, but the pale cheeks were just a little sunken, and there were lines about those thoughtful eyes, and a weary look about the resolute lips. If there was a fault to be found in the face, it was perhaps the too prominent lower brow, in which the perceptive organs were developed in an extreme degree; yet this very prominence gave character and individuality to the countenance.

James Wyatt heard the regretful sigh, and noted the despondence of his companion's tone.

'I should have thought there were not many people in England you would care about leaving, Davenant,' he said, with a curiously watchful look at the other man's half-averted face, 'I've heard you boast of standing alone in the world.'

'Rather a barren boast, isn't it?' said Sir Cyprian, with a brief and bitter laugh. 'Yes, I am quite alone. Since my sister Marian's marriage, and complete absorption in nursery cares and nursery joys, there is no one to offer let or hindrance to my going yonder. I have friends, of

course, a great many—such as you, Jim, for instance; jolly good fellows who would smoke a cigar with me to-night in the bonds of friendship, and who would hear of my death a month hence without turning a hair.'

'Don't talk platitudes about your friends, Cyprian. I have no doubt they are as good as other people's. I don't know a man going more popular than you are.'

Cyprian Davenant took no notice of this remark.

'Dear old river,' he murmured tenderly. 'Poor old river, how many of the happiest hours of my life have been spent upon your banks, or on your breast! Shall I ever see you again, I wonder, or shall I find a grave in some reedy marsh far away from the Thames and Medway? Don't think me a sentimental old fool, Jim; but the fact is, I am a little out of spirits to-night. I ought not to have accepted Sinclair's invitation. I talked nineteen to the dozen at dinner, and drank no end of hock and seltzer, but I felt as dreary as a ghost assisting at his own funeral. I suppose I

am too old for this African business. I have outlived the explorer's spirit, and have a foolish kind of presentiment that the thing will come to a bad end. Of course I wouldn't own to such a feeling amongst the men who are going, but I may confess as much to you without being put down as a craven.'

'I'll tell you what it is, Davenant,' answered the lawyer. 'There is something deeper than you have owned to yet at the bottom of your reluctance to leave England. There is some one, a least—a woman.'

The other turned his face full upon the speaker. 'You're about right, Jim,' he said, tossing the end of his cigar away as he spoke. 'There is a woman, not a sudden caprice either, but a woman I have loved truly and fondly for the last five years of my life. If I were a wise man I should be very glad of this chance of curing my infatuation by putting a few thousand miles between myself and the loveliest face I ever saw.'

'It's a hopeless case then, I suppose?' suggested James Wyatt.

'Quite hopeless. What have I to offer the woman I love? The income upon which I have managed to live, since my ruin and subsequent reformation, would be something worse than beggary for a wife such as the woman I love. Even if she were willing to share my poverty, could I be mean enough to drag her into such a slough of despond? No, Jim, it is a hopeless case. My pretty one and I must part,—I to dreary old bachelorhood, she to fulfil her mission, and make one of the grand matches of the season.'

'I think I know the lady,' said James Wyatt, slowly. 'Lord Clanyarde's youngest daughter, the new one, eh, Cyprian? The Clanyardes are neighbours of yours in Kent, I know.'

'Of course I can trust you, Jim. Yes, you've hit it. But what made you fix upon Constance Clanyarde?'

'Have not I senses to understand, and eyes to see? and have I not seen you and Miss Clanyarde together at least three times? Why, Cyprian, the infatuation on both sides is patent to the most

unsophisticated observer. It's a pity you've only four hundred a year. That would be rather a tight squeeze for a Clanyarde. They're a notoriously extravagant set, I know, and have been up to their eyes in debt for the last forty years. Yes, I have seen the lady, Cyprian, and she is very lovely. Upon my word I'm sorry for you.'

'Thanks, old fellow. I needn't ask you not to mention my name in conjunction with Miss Clanyarde's. And now I suppose we'd better go back to our friends.'

'I think so. By the way, what do you think of the lady we were asked to meet?'

'Mrs. Walsingham. She is very handsome. A widow, I suppose?'

'She is rather silent on that point, and I have heard it hinted that Colonel Walsingham—he was colonel in the Spanish contingent, I believe, and count of the Holy Roman Empire—still walks this earth, and that the lady owes her agreeable freedom to an American court of divorce. The antecedents are altogether doubtful, and Mrs. Walsingham's society is of the Bohemian order—actors and artists,

and nice little women who keep miniature broughams, and don't seem to belong to anybody. Gilbert Sinclair likes that kind of thing.'

'And I suppose Mrs. Walsingham likes Gilbert Sinclair?'

'Or his money. Sinclair's about the biggest fish in the matrimonial waters, and she will be a happy angler who lands him. But I really believe Mrs. Walsingham has a weakness for the man himself, independent of his money. Strange, isn't it? Sinclair's the dearest fellow in the world, and as his friend, of course, I doat upon him; but I confess that if I were a woman I should regard him with unmitigated loathing.'

'That's rather strong.'

'Of course he's a most estimable creature—outspoken, frank, liberal, all the manly virtues; but such an unspeakable snob, such a pompous, purse-proud cad. Ah, there he is at the window, looking for us. If I were a woman, you know, Cyprian, that man would be the object of my aversion; but I'm not, and he's my client, and it is the first duty of a solicitor to love his clients. Coming, Gilbert.'

The two men crossed a little bit of lawn, and went in through the open window. The room was lighted with wax candles, and a merry party was crowded round a table, at one end of which a lady was dispensing tea in quite a homelike fashion. She was a very beautiful woman, of a showy type, dressed in India muslin and lace, dressed just a shade too youthfully for her five-and-thirty years. There were two other ladies present, one a fashionable actress, the other her friend and confidante, also an aspirant to dramatic fame. The first was occupied in an agreeable flirtation with a cornet of dragoons; the second was listening with delight to the lively conversation of Mr. Bellingham, the manager of the Phœnix Theatre. A couple of gentlemen belonging to the stockbroking fraternity, and Gilbert Sinclair, the giver of the feast, made up the party.

Mr. Bellingham had been entertaining the company with anecdotes of MacStinger, the great tragedian, the point of every story turning on the discomfiture of the great man by some blundering tyro in dramatic art. Mrs. Walsingham had heard most of the stories a good many times before, and

she gave a palpable little yawn as Mr. Bellingham told her how the provincial Horatio informed the great Hamlet that his father's ghost 'would have much *amused* you.' She covered the yawn with her pretty plump little hand, and watched Gilbert Sinclair's face with rather a troubled expression in her own, and in so doing was a little inattentive to the demand for more cups of tea.

Mr. Sinclair was a man whom many people admired, and who was in no obvious manner deserving James Wyatt's unflattering description. He affected a certain bluntness of style, which his friends accepted as evidence of a candid and open soul and a warm heart. He was generous to a lavish degree towards those he associated with and was supposed to like; but he was not liberal with protestations of regard, and he had few intimate acquaintances. He was a man whom some people called handsome—a big man upwards of six feet high, and with a ponderous, powerful frame. He had large regular features, a florid complexion, prominent reddish brown eyes, thick curling hair, of the same reddish brown, and intensely white teeth.

The chief claim which Mr. Sinclair possessed to notoriety was comprised in the fact of his wealth. He was the owner of a great estate in the north, an estate consisting of ironworks and coalpits, the annual income from which was said to be something stupendous, and he had shares in more railways and mines and foreign loans than his friends could calculate. His father had been dead about five years, leaving Gilbert sole possessor of this great fortune, unfettered by a claim, for the young man was an only child, and had neither kith nor kin to share his wealth. He had been at Rugby and Cambridge, and had travelled all over Europe with a private tutor. He had seen everything and had been taught everything that a wealthy young Englishman ought to see or to learn, and had profited in a very moderate degree by the process. He had a strong will and a great capacity for keeping his own secrets, and had started in life with the determination to enjoy existence after his own fashion. After three years spent in his companionship, his tutor remarked that he scarcely knew Gilbert Sinclair any better at the close of their acquaint-

ance than he had known him at the beginning of it.

'And yet the fellow seems so candid,' said Mr. Ashton, the tutor, wonderingly.

'I wish you would give me a little assistance with the teacups, Gilbert,' Mrs. Walsingham said, rather impatiently. 'It is all very well to talk of the pleasantness of having the tea made in the room in this way, but one requires some help. Thanks. Take that to Sir Cyprian Davenant, if you please, and bring me Sophy Morton's cup.'

Mr. Sinclair obeyed, and when he came back with the empty cup Mrs. Walsingham motioned him to a vacant chair by her side, and detained him there till the carriages were announced. She called him by his Christian name in the face of society, and this party of to-night was only one of many entertainments that had been given at different times for her gratification. It was scarcely strange, therefore, if rumour, especially loud on the part of the lady's friends, declared that Mr. Sinclair and Mrs. Walsingham were engaged to be married. But the acquaintance between them had continued for a long

time, and those who knew most of Gilbert Sinclair shook their heads significantly when the matrimonial question was mooted.

'Gilbert knows his own value,' growled old Colonel Mordant, an inveterate whist-player and diner-out, who had introduced young Sinclair into fast society. 'When he marries he will marry well. A man with my friend Sinclair's fortune must have all the advantages in the lady of his choice—youth, beauty, rank—or, at any rate, position. Most men of that calibre look out for a corresponding amount of wealth. I don't say Sinclair will do that. He is rich enough to indulge in a caprice. But as to marrying Clara Walsingham—a deuced fine woman, I grant you! *Pas si bête!*'

Mrs. Walsingham detained Mr. Sinclair in conversation some time after the carriages had been announced. She was very bright and animated, and looked her best as she talked to him. It was nearly eleven o'clock when she was reminded of the lateness of the hour, and the length of the drive before them, by Miss Sophy Morton, who

had latterly transferred her attention from the callow cornet to Mr. Wyatt, much to the disgust of the youthful dragoon.

'Yes, Sophy, I am just going to put on my shawl. Will you fetch our wraps from the next room, please, Mr. Wyatt? Will you take the back seat in the brougham, Gilbert, and wind up with a lobster salad in Half-moon Street? It is really early, you know.'

'Thanks, no. I could scarcely trust my man to drive those chestnuts, so I think I'll go back in the phaeton; and I'm due at a hop in Eaton Square.'

'Indeed?' asked the lady, curiously, and with a rather anxious look. 'You used not to care for dancing parties.'

'I don't care for them now, but one has to sacrifice inclination now and then, you know.'

'Do I know the people?' asked Mrs. Walsingham.

Mr. Sinclair smiled as he replied, 'I think not.'

A cloud came over the lady's face, and when

her shawl had been adjusted she took Gilbert Sinclair's arm in silence. Nor did she speak to him on the way to the porch of the hotel, where a mail phaeton and a couple of broughams were waiting. Her adieux to the rest of the party were brief and cold, and Gilbert himself she only honoured by a stately inclination of her beautiful head, with its coronal of bright chestnut hair, and coquettish little curls dotted about a broad white forehead.

Mr. Sinclair stood bareheaded under the porch as the Walsingham brougham drove away, and then turned with a frown to perform his duties in other directions. Here, however, he found there was nothing left for him to do. Miss Morton and her companion had been escorted to their carriage by Sir Cyprian Davenant and Mr. Wyatt, and were waiting to bid their host good-bye.

'And a thousand thanks for our delightful day, Mr. Sinclair, which we are not likely to forget for a long time, are we, Imogen?'

Miss Imogen Harlow, who had been born Watson and christened Mary Anne, shook her

empty little head coquettishly, and declared that the memory of that Richmond dinner would remain with her to her dying day. And on the way home the two ladies discussed Mr. Sinclair and the probable amount of his income, and speculated as to the chances of his ultimately marrying Mrs. Walsingham.

CHAPTER II.

'WHEN WE TWO PARTED.'

Sir Cyprian Davenant and James Wyatt went back to town by rail, and parted company at Waterloo, the baronet going westward to his bachelor lodgings in one of the shabbier streets about Grosvenor Square, the lawyer to a big dull house in Bloomsbury Square, which his father had bought and furnished some fifty years before, and in which there was a large collection of old pictures, and a still larger collection of rare old wines stored away in great gloomy cellars with ponderous iron-plated doors. Mr. Wyatt the elder had done a good deal of business, of a very profitable kind, with the youthful members of the British aristocracy, had raised loans for them, at heavy rates of interest, never omitting to remind them of the sacrifice they made in borrowing money at all, and only yielding to the stern necessities of their

position in a reluctant grudging spirit at the last, whereby the foolish young men were in no manner prevented from rushing blindfold along the broad road to ruin, but were kept in ignorance of the fact that it was from Thomas Wyatt's own coffers that the money came, and that to him the interest accrued.

James Wyatt inherited his father's astute mind, together with his father's handsome fortune, and he had cultivated very much the same kind of business, making himself eminently useful to his young friends, and winning for himself the character of a most prudent friend and adviser. He did not take the risks of an ordinary money-lender, and he raised money for his clients on terms that seemed moderate when compared with the usurer's exorbitant demands; but he contrived nevertheless to profit considerably by every transaction, and he never let a client escape him while there was a feather to pluck.

Sir Cyprian Davenant had been in this gentleman's hands ever since his coming of age, but now that there was not an acre of the Davenant estate unmortgaged, and the day was not far off in which

must come foreclosure or sale, the relations between the two men were rather those of friendship than business. Cyprian had lived his life, had wasted his last available shilling, and had reformed. His dissipations had never been of a base or degrading order. He had been wild and reckless, had played high at his club, and lost money on the turf, and kept an extravagant stud, and ridden in steeplechases at home and abroad, and had indulged in many other follies peculiar to his age and station; but he had no low vices, and when his money was gone, and the freshness of youth with it, he fell from the ranks of his fast friends without a sigh. It was too late for him to think of a profession; and there seemed to be no brighter fate possible for him than the dreary monotony of old bachelorhood on a limited income.

'I suppose I shall live to be an old fogy,' he said to himself. 'I shall have my particular corner at the club, and be greedy about the newspapers, and bore the youngsters with my vapid old stories. What a barren waste of years to look forward to!'

Sir Cyprian had work to do after the Richmond

dinner, and was occupied till long after daybreak with letter-writing, and the last details of his packing. When all was done he was still wakeful, and sat by his writing-table in the morning sunlight, thinking of the past and the future with a gloomy face.

Thinking of the past—of all those careless hours in which one bright girlish face had been the chief influence of his life ; thinking of the future, in which he was to see that sweet face no more.

'How happy we have been together!' he thought, as he bent over a photograph framed in the lid of his despatch-box, contemplating the lovely face with a fond smile, and a tender dreaming look in his dark eyes. 'What long hours of boredom I have gone through in the way of evening parties in order to get a waltz with her, or a few minutes of quiet talk in some balcony or conservatory, and all for the vain delight of loving her! Without one ray of hope for the future, with the knowledge that I was doing her a great wrong in following her up so closely with my barren love. So even James Wyatt saw my infatuation! And hers, he said. Is there any truth

in that last assertion, I wonder? Does Constance really care for me? I have never asked her the question, never betrayed myself by any direct avowal. Yet these things make themselves understood somehow, and I think my darling knows that I would willingly die for her: and I think I know that she will never care for any man as she could care for me!'

He shut the despatch-box, and began to walk slowly up and down the room, thinking.

'There would be just time for me to do it,' he said to himself presently; 'just time for me to run down to Davenant, and see the old place once more. It will be sold before I come back from Africa, if ever I do come back. And there would be the chance of seeing her. I know the Clanyardes have gone back to Kent. Yes, I will run down to Davenant for a few hours. A man must be hard indeed who does not care to give one farewell look at the house in which the brightest years of his life have been spent. And I may see her again, only to say good-bye, and to see if she is sorry for my going. What more can I say to her? What more need be

said? She knows that I would lay down my life for her.'

He went to his room, and slept a kind of fitful sleep until eight o'clock, when he woke with a start, and began to dress for his journey. At nine he was driving through the streets in a hansom, and at midday he was in one of the woody lanes leading across country from the little Kentish railway station to his own ancestral domain, the place he had once been proud and fond of, but which he looked at now in bitterness of spirit, and with a passionate regret. The estate had been much encumbered when it fell into his hands, but he knew that, with prudence, he might have saved the greater part of it.

He entered the park by a rustic gateway, beside which there was a keeper's lodge, a gate dividing the thickest part of the wood from a broad green valley, where the fern grew deep under the spreading branches of giant oaks, and around the smooth silvery trunks of fine old beeches. The Davenant timber had suffered little from the prodigal's destroying hand. He could better endure the loss of the place than its desecration.

The woman at the keeper's lodge welcomed her master with an exclamation of surprise.

'I hope you have come to stay, Sir Cyprian,' she said, dropping a rustic curtsey.

'No, Mrs. Mead, I have only come for a last look at the old place before I go away from England.'

'Going away, sir! that's bad news.'

Cyprian cut short her lamentations with a friendly nod, and was walking on, when it suddenly struck him that the woman might be useful.

'Oh, by the way,' he said, 'Lord Clanyarde is at Marchbrook, is he not?'

'Yes, sir, the family have been there for the last week.'

'Then I'll walk over there before I go on to the house, if you'll unlock the gate again, Mrs. Mead.'

'Shall I send one of my boys to the house with a message, sir, about dinner, or anything?'

'You are very good. Yes, you can send the lad to tell old Mrs. Pomfret to get me something to eat at six o'clock, if you please. I must get back to London by the 7.30 train.'

'Deary me, sir, going back so soon as that?'

The gates of Marchbrook were about half a mile distant from the keeper's lodge. Lord Clanyarde's house was a dreary red brick habitation, of the Georgian era, with long lines of narrow windows looking out upon a blank expanse of pasture land, by courtesy a park. An avenue of elms led from the lodge gate to the southern front of the house, and on the western side there was a prim Dutch garden, divided from the park by a ha-ha. The place was in perfect order, but there was a cold, bare look about everything that was eminently suggestive of narrow means.

A woman at the lodge informed Sir Cyprian that there was no one at home. Lord Clanyarde had driven to Maidstone. Miss Clanyarde was in the village; she had gone to see the children at the National School. She would be home at two, to lunch, no doubt, according to her usual habit. She was very fond of the school, and sometimes spent her morning in teaching the children.

'But they leave school at twelve, don't they?' demanded Sir Cyprian.

'Yes, sir; but I dare say Miss Constance has

stopped to talk to Miss Evans, the schoolmistress. She is a very genteel young person, and quite a favourite with our ladies.'

Cyprian Davenant knew the little school-house, and the road by which Constance Clanyarde must return from her mission. Nothing could be more pleasant to him than the idea of meeting her in her solitary walk. He turned away from the lodge-keeper, muttering something vague about calling again later, and walked at a rapid pace to the neighbouring village, which consisted of two straggling rows of old-fashioned cottages fringing the skirts of a common. Close to the old ivy-covered church, with its massive square tower and grass-grown graveyard, there was a modern Gothic building in which the village children struggled through the difficulties of an educational course, and from the open windows whereof their youthful voices rang loudly out upon the summer air every morning in a choral version of the multiplication table.

Miss Clanyarde was standing in the little stone porch talking to the schoolmistress when Sir Cyprian opened the low wooden gate. She looked

up at the sound of his footstep with a sudden blush.

'I did not know you were at Davenant, Sir Cyprian,' he said, with some little embarrassment, as they shook hands.

'I have not been at Davenant, Miss Clanyarde. I only left town this morning. I have come down here to say good-bye to Davenant and all old friends.'

The blush faded, and left the lovely face very pale.

'Is it true that you are going to Africa? I heard from some friends in town that you were to join Captain Harcourt's expedition.'

'It is quite true. I promised Harcourt some years ago that if he ever went again I would go with him.'

'And you are pleased to go, I suppose?'

'No, Miss Clanyarde, not pleased to go. But I think that sort of thing is about the best employment for the energies of a waif and stray, such as I am. I have lived my life, you see, and have not a single card left to play in the game of civilized

existence. There is some hope of adventure out yonder. Are you going home?'

'Yes, I was just saying good-bye to Miss Evans as you came in.'

'Then I'll walk back to Marchbrook with you, if you'll allow me. I told the lodge-keeper I would return by and by in the hope of seeing Lord Clanyarde.'

'You have been to Marchbrook already, then?'

'Yes, and they told me at the lodge that I should find you here.'

After this there came rather an awkward silence. They walked away from the school-house side by side, Sir Cyprian furtively watchful of his companion's face, in which there were signs of a sorrow that seemed something deeper than the conventional regret which a fashionable beauty might express for the departure of a favourite waltzer.

The silence was not broken until they had arrived at a point where two roads met, the turnpike road to Marchbrook, and a shady lane, a cross country road, above which the overarching branches of the elms made a roof of foliage in this midsummer

season. There was a way of reaching Marchbrook by this lane, a tempting walk compared to the high road.

'Let us go back by the lane,' said Cyprian. 'It is a little longer, but I am sure you are not in a hurry. You would have dawdled away half the morning talking to that young woman at the school if I hadn't come to fetch you, and it will be our last walk together, Constance. I may call you Constance, may I not, as I used when you were in the nursery? I am entitled to a few dismal privileges, like a dying man, you know. Oh, Constance, what happy hours we have spent together in these Kentish lanes! I shall see them in my dreams out yonder, and your face will shine down upon me from a background of green leaves and blue sky; and then I shall awake to find myself camping out upon some stretch of barren sand, with jackals howling in the distance.'

'What a dreadful picture!' said Constance, with a faint forced laugh. 'But if you are so reluctant to leave England, why do you persist in this African expedition?'

'It is a point of honour with me to keep my

promise; and it is better for me to be away from England.'

'You are the best judge of that question.'

Sir Cyprian was slow to reply to this remark. He had come down to Kent upon a sudden impulse, determined in no manner to betray his own folly, and bent only upon snatching the vain delight of a farewell interview with the girl he loved. But to be with her, and not to tell her the truth was more difficult than he had imagined. He could see that she was sorry for his departure, he believed that she loved him, but he knew enough of Viscount Clanyarde's principles and his daughter's education to know there would be something worse than cruelty in asking this girl to share his broken fortunes.

'Yes, Constance,' he went on, 'it is better for me to be away. So long as I am here it is the old story of the insect and the flame. I cannot keep out of temptation. I cannot keep myself from haunting the places where I am likely to meet the girl I love, fondly, foolishly, hopelessly. Don't look at me with those astonished eyes, my darling. You must have known my secret ever so long. I meant to keep silence till

the end; but you see the words are spoken in spite of me. My love, I dare not ask you to be my wife. I dare only tell you that no other woman will ever bear that name. You are not angry with me, Constance, for having spoken?'

'Angry with you——' she began, and then broke down utterly, and burst into tears.

He drew his arm round her with a tender protecting gesture, and soothed her gently, as if she had been a child.

'Dear love, I am not worth your tears. If I had been a better man I might have redeemed Davenant by this time, and might have hoped to make you my wife. There would have been some hope for me, would there not, dear, if I could have offered you a home that your father could approve?'

'I am not so mercenary as you think me,' answered Constance, drying her tears, and disengaging herself from Sir Cyprian's encircling arm. 'I am not afraid of poverty. But I know that my father would never forgive——'

'And I know it too, my dearest girl, and you shall not be asked to break with your father for

such a man as I. I never meant to speak of this, dear, but perhaps it is better that I should have spoken. You will soon forget me, Constance, and I shall hear of you making some brilliant marriage before I have been away very long. God grant the man may be worthy of you. God grant you may marry a good man.'

'I am not very likely to marry,' replied Miss Clanyarde.

'My dearest, it is not possible you can escape. Heaven forbid that my shadow should come between you and a happy future. It is enough for one of us to carry the burden of a life-long regret.'

There was much more talk between them before they arrived at a little gate opening into the Marchbrook kitchen-garden; fond regretful talk of the days that were gone, in which they had been so much together down in Kent, with all the freedom permitted between friends and neighbours of long standing, the days before Constance had made her *début* in the great world.

Sir Cyprian did not persevere in his talked-of visit to Lord Clanyarde. He had, in truth, very little

desire to see that gentleman. At the little garden gate he took Miss Clanyarde's two hands in his own with one fond fervent clasp.

'You know the old song,' he said, '"it may be for years, and it may be for ever." It *is* an eternal parting for me, darling, for I can never hope to call you by that sweet name again. You have been very good to me in letting me speak so freely to-day, and it is a kind of consolation to have told you my sorrow. God bless you, and good-bye.'

This was their parting. Sir Cyprian went back to Davenant, and spent a dreary hour in walking up and down the corridor, and looking into the empty rooms. He remembered them tenanted by the loved and lost. How dismal they were now in their blank and unoccupied state! and how little likelihood there was that he should ever see them again! His dinner was served for him in a pretty breakfast-room, with a bow-window overlooking a garden that had been his mother's delight, and where the roses she had loved still blossomed in all their glory. The memory of the dead was with him as he eat his solitary meal, and he was glad when it was time for

him to leave the great desolate house, in which every door closed with a dismal reverberation, as if it had been shutting upon a vault.

He left Davenant immediately after dinner, and walked back to the little station, thinking mournfully enough of his day's work, and of the life that lay before him. Before noon next day he and his companions were on the first stage of their journey, speeding towards Marseilles.

CHAPTER III.

'IT WAS THINE OATH THAT FIRST DID FAIL.'

NEARLY a year had gone since Cyprian Davenant turned his back upon British soil. It was the end of May, high season in London, and unusually brilliant weather, the West End streets and squares thronged with carriages, and everywhere throughout that aristocratic western world a delightful flutter and buzz of life and gaiety; as if the children of that pleasant region had indeed in some manner secured an exemption from the cares and sorrows of meaner mortals, and were bent on making the most of their privileged existence.

A neatly appointed brougham waited before the door of a house in Half-moon Street, and had been waiting there for some time. It was Mrs. Walsingham's brougham, and the lady herself was slowly pacing up and down her little drawing-room, pausing every now and then to look out of the window and

in a very unpleasant state of mind. She was dressed for walking, in one of those airy combinations of India muslin and fine old lace which she so much affected, her warm brown hair crowned with a bonnet that seemed to be made of pansies, and she was looking very handsome, in spite of the cloud upon her brow, and a certain angry sparkle in her eyes.

'I suppose he is not coming,' she muttered at last, tossing her white silk umbrella upon the table with a petulant gesture. 'This will be the second disappointment in a week. But I shall not go to the concert without him. What do I care for their tiresome classical music, Hummel, and Chopin, and all the rest of them, or to be stared at by a crowd of great ladies who don't choose to know me?'

She rang the bell violently, but before it could be answered there came a thundering double knock at the door below, and a minute afterwards Gilbert Sinclair dashed into the room.

'Late again, Gilbert,' cried Mrs. Walsingham, reproachfully, her face brightening nevertheless at his coming, and kindling with a pleased welcoming smile as they shook hands.

'Yes, I know, it's late for that confounded concert. But I want you to let me off that infliction, Clara. That sort of thing is such a consummate bore to a man who doesn't know the difference between Balfe and Beethoven, and you know I have a heap of engagements on my hands.'

'You have only come to cry off, then?' said Mrs. Walsingham, with a sudden contraction of her firmly moulded lips.

'My dear Clara, how demoniac you can look when you like! But I wouldn't cultivate that kind of expression if I were you. Of course I'll go to the concert with you if you are bent upon it, rather than run the risk of anything in the way of a scene. But you know very well that I don't care for music, and you ought to know——'

He stopped, hesitating, with a furtive look in his red-brown eyes, and a nervous action of one big hand about his thick brown moustache.

'I ought to know what, Mr. Sinclair?' asked Clara Walsingham, with a sudden hardness of voice and manner.

'That it is good neither for your reputation nor

mine that we should be seen so often together at such places as this Portman Square concert. It is almost a private affair, you know, and everybody present will know all about us.'

'Indeed! and since when has Mr. Gilbert Sinclair become so careful of his reputation—or of mine?'

'Since you set your friends talking about our being engaged to be married, Mrs. Walsingham. You have rather too many feminine acquaintances with long tongues. I don't like being congratulated—or chaffed—it comes to pretty much the same thing—upon an event which you and I know can never happen.'

'Never is a long word, Gilbert. My husband may die, and leave me free to become your wife; if you should do me the honour to repeat the proposal which you made to me six years ago.'

'I don't like waiting for dead men's shoes, Clara,' answered Sinclair, in rather a sulky tone. 'I made you that offer in all good faith, when I believed you to be a widow, and when I was madly in love with you; but six years is a long time, and——'

He broke down again, and stood before her with his eyes fixed on the ground.

'And men are fickle,' she said, taking up his unfinished sentence. 'What is that Alfred de Musset says?'—

"C'est l'histoire du cœur.—Tout va si vite en lui!
Tout y meurt, comme un son, tout, excepté l'ennui!"

That is what a man says of himself, you know. The woman in the story is constant—constant in her love and constant in her revenge. You have grown tired of me, Gilbert, is that what you mean?'

'Not exactly that, Clara, but rather tired of a position that keeps me a single man without a single man's liberty. You are quite as exacting as a wife, more jealous than a mistress; and I am getting to an age now at which a man begins to feel a kind of yearning for something more like a home than chambers in the Albany, some one more like a wife than a lady who requires one to be perpetually playing the *cavaliere servente*.'

'Have I been exacting, Gilbert? I did not know that. I have tried my uttermost to make my house agreeable to you. Believe me, I care less

for gaiety than you imagine. I should be satisfied with a very dull life if I saw you often. Oh, Gilbert, I think you ought to know how well I love you.'

'I could better have believed that six years ago, if you had consented to leave England with me, as I proposed, when I found out the secret of Colonel Walsingham's existence, and that the Yankee divorce was all bosh.'

'I loved you too well to sink as low as that, Gilbert.'

'I thought the strength of a woman's love was best shown by her sacrifice of self. You preferred your reputation to my happiness, and have kept me dangling on ever since, for the gratification of your vanity, I suppose. It would have been more generous to have dismissed me, and made an end of the farce at once.'

'You were not so willing to be dismissed until very lately, Gilbert. You were quite willing that we should continue friends, with the hope that the future might make us something nearer and dearer. Why have you grown so tired of me all of a sudden?'

'I tell you again, it is the position I am tired of, not you. If you were free to marry me it would be a different thing, of course. As it is we are both wasting our lives, and getting ourselves talked about into the bargain.'

Clara Walsingham laughed scornfully at this.

'I care very little what people say of me,' she said. 'English society has not chosen to receive me very graciously, and I feel myself at liberty to despise its petty by-laws. Nor did I think you would consider yourself injured by having your name linked with mine.'

'But you see, Clara, it does a man harm to have it said he is engaged to a woman he never can marry. It does him some kind of harm in certain circles.'

'How vague you are, Gilbert, and how mysterious! Some kind of harm in certain circles. What does that mean?'

She stood for a minute looking at him, with a sudden intensity in her face. He kept his eyes on the ground during that sharp scrutiny, but he was fully conscious of it nevertheless.

'Gilbert Sinclair,' she cried, after a long pause, 'you are in love with some other woman. You are going to jilt me.'

There was a suppressed agony in her tone which both surprised and alarmed the man to whom she spoke. Of late he had doubted the sincerity of her attachment to him, and had fostered that doubt, telling himself that it was his wealth she cared for.

'Would it grieve you very much if I were to marry, Clara?' he asked.

'Grieve me if you were to marry! It would be the end of my life. I would never forgive you. But you are playing with me. You are only trying to frighten me.'

'You are frightening yourself,' he answered. 'I only put the question in a speculative way. Let us drop the subject. If you want to go to the concert——'

'I don't want to go; I am not fit to go anywhere. Will you ring that bell, please? I shall send the brougham back to the stable.'

'Won't you drive in the park this fine afternoon?'

'No; I am fit for nothing now.'

A maid-servant came in answer to the bell.

'You can take my bonnet, Filby,' said Mrs. Walsingham, removing that floral structure, 'and tell Johnson I shall not want the brougham to-day. You'll stop to dinner, won't you, Gilbert?' she went on when the maid had retired. 'Mr. Wyatt is to be here, and Sophy Morton.'

'How fond you are of those actor people! So Jim Wyatt is coming, is he? I rather want to see him. But I have other engagements this afternoon, and I really don't think I can stay.'

'Oh, yes, you can, Gilbert. I shall think I had just grounds for my suspicion if you are so eager to run away.'

'Very well, Clara, if you make a point of it I will stop.'

Mr. Sinclair threw himself into one of the low luxurious chairs, with an air of resignation scarcely complimentary to his hostess. Time was when this woman had exercised a profound power over him, when he had been indeed eager to make her his wife; but that time was past and gone. He was tired of

an alliance which demanded from him more than it was in his selfish nature to give; and he was inclined to be angry with himself for having wasted so much of his life upon an infatuation which he now accounted the one supreme mistake of his career. Before his charmed eyes there had appeared a vision of womanly loveliness compared with which Clara Walsingham's beauty seemed of the earth, earthy. He could not deny that she was beautiful, but in that other girlish face there was a magic which he had never before encountered, a glamour that enthralled his narrow soul.

The interval before dinner dragged wearily, in spite of Mrs. Walsingham's efforts to sustain a pleasant conversation about trifles. Gilbert was not to be beguiled into animated discussion upon any subject whatever. It seemed as if the two were treading cautiously upon the verge of some conversational abyss, some dangerous chasm, into whose depths they might at any moment descend with a sudden plunge.

Mrs. Walsingham questioned her companion about his plans for the end of the season.

'Shall you go to Norway for the salmon fishing?' she asked.

'I think not. I am tired of that part of the world.'

'Then I suppose you will amuse yourself with the grouse in Scotland?'

'No, I have just declined a share in a moor. I am heartily sick of grouse shooting. I have really no settled plans as yet. I shall contrive to get rid of the autumn somehow, no doubt.'

The conversation dawdled on in this languid manner for a couple of hours, and then Mr. Sinclair went away to change his loose gray suit for the regulation evening dress.

The smile which Mrs. Walsingham's face had worn while she talked to him faded the moment he had left her, and she began to pace the room with rapid steps and a clouded brow.

'Yes, there is no doubt of it,' she muttered to herself, with suppressed passion. 'I have seen the change in him for the last twelve months. There is some one else. How should I lose him if it were not so? Heaven knows what pains I have taken to

retain my hold upon him! There is some one else. He is afraid to tell me the truth. He is wise in that respect. Who can the woman be for whom I am to be forsaken? He knows so many people, and visits so much, and is everywhere courted and flattered on account of his money. Oh, Gilbert, fool, fool! Will any woman ever love you as I have loved you, for your own sake, without a thought of your fortune, with a blind idolatry which has made me indifferent to your faults? What is it that I love in him, I wonder? I know that he is not a good man. I have seen his heartlessness too often of late not to know that he is hard and cruel and remorseless towards those who come between him and his iron will. But I, too, could be hard and remorseless if a great wrong were done me. Yes, even to him. Let him take care how he provokes a passionate, reckless nature like mine. Let him beware of playing with fire.'

This was the gist of her thoughts during a gloomy reverie that lasted more than an hour. At the end of that time Miss Morton was announced, and came fluttering into the room, resplendent in

rose-coloured silk and black lace, followed shortly by James Wyatt, the lawyer, courteous and debonnair, full of small talk and the latest fashionable scandal. Gilbert Sinclair was the last to enter.

The dinner was elegantly served in a pretty little dining-room, hung with pale green draperies, and adorned with a few clever water-colour pictures, a room in which there was a delightful air of coolness and repose. The folding-doors between the two rooms on the ground-floor had been removed, and the back room was covered with a cool Indian matting, and converted into a kind of conservatory for large ferns and orange trees, the dark foliage whereof made an agreeable background to the pollard oak furniture in the dining-room. There was no profuse display of plate upon the round table, but the wine flasks and tall-stemmed glasses were old Venetian, and the dessert service was old Wedgewood.

Mr. Wyatt was invaluable in the task of sustaining the conversation, and Clara Walsingham seconded him admirably, though there was a sharp anguish at her heart that was now almost an habitual pain, an

agony prophetic of a coming blow. Gilbert Sinclair was a little brighter than he had been in the afternoon, and contributed his share to the talk with a decent grace, only once or twice betraying absence of mind by a careless answer and a wandering look in his big brown eyes.

James Wyatt and Mrs. Walsingham had been running through a catalogue of the changes of fortune, for good or evil, that had befallen their common acquaintances, when Gilbert broke in upon their talk suddenly with the question,—

'What has become of that fellow who dined with us at Richmond last year? Sir Cyprian something.'

'Sir Cyprian Davenant,' said James Wyatt. 'He is still in Africa.'

'In Africa; ah, yes, to be sure, I remember hearing that he was going to join Harcourt's expedition. I was not much impressed by him, though I had heard him talked about as something out of the common way. He had precious little to say for himself.'

'You saw him at a disadvantage that day. He was out of spirits at leaving England.'

'Very likely; but I had met him in society very often before. He's rather a well-looking fellow, no doubt; but I certainly couldn't discover any special merit in him beyond his good looks. He's a near neighbour of the Clanyardes, by the way, when he's at home, is he not?'

'When he's at home, yes,' answered the solicitor. 'But I doubt if ever he'll go home again.'

'You mean that he'll come by his death in Africa, I suppose?'

'I sincerely hope not, for Cyprian Davenant is one of my oldest friends. No, I mean that he's not very likely to see the inside of his ancestral halls any more. The place is to be sold this year.'

'The baronet is quite cleaned out, then?'

'He has about four hundred a year which he inherited from his mother, so tightly tied up that he has not been able to make away with it.'

'What Clanyardes are those?' asked Mrs. Walsingham.

'Viscount Clanyarde and his family. They have a place called Marchbrook, and a very poor place it

is, the adjoining estate to Davenant. The old Viscount is as poor as Job.'

'Indeed. But his youngest daughter will make a great match, no doubt, and redeem the fortunes of the house. I saw her at the opera the other night. She was pointed out to me as the loveliest girl in London, and I really think she has a right to be called so. What do you think of her, Gilbert?'

She fixed her eyes upon Sinclair with a sudden scrutiny that took him off his guard. A dusky flush came over his face, and he hesitated awkwardly before replying to her very simple question.

Clara Walsingham's heart gave a great throb.

'That is the woman,' she said to herself.

'Miss Clanyarde is very handsome,' stammered Gilbert, 'at least, I believe that is the general opinion about her. She has been intimate with your friend Davenant ever since she was a child, hasn't she, Wyatt?' he asked, with an indifference of tone which one listener knew to be assumed.

'Yes, I have heard him say as much,' the other answered, with an air of reserve which implied the

possession of more knowledge upon this point than he cared to impart.

'Those acquaintances of the nursery are apt to end in something more than friendship,' said Mrs. Walsingham. 'Is there any engagement between Sir Cyprian and Miss Clanyarde?'

'Decidedly not.'

Gilbert Sinclair burst into a harsh laugh.

'Not very likely,' he exclaimed. 'I should like to see old Clanyarde's face if his daughter talked of marrying a gentlemanly pauper.'

'That is the woman he loves,' Mrs. Walsingham repeated to herself.

No more was said about Sir Cyprian or the Clanyardes. The conversation drifted into other channels, and the evening wore itself away more or less pleasantly, with the assistance of music by and by in the drawing-room, where there were a few agreeable droppers in. Mrs. Walsingham played brilliantly, and possessed a fine mezzo-soprano, which had been cultivated to an extreme degree. There were those who said she had been an opera singer before her marriage with that notorious *roué* and

reprobate, Vernon Walsingham. But this was not true. Clara Walsingham's musical powers had never been exercised professionally. She had a real love of music, for its own sake, and found consolation during many desolate hours in the companionship of her piano.

CHAPTER IV.

'OFFEND HER AND SHE KNOWS NOT TO FORGIVE.'

THREE days after the little dinner in Half-moon Street, Mrs. Walsingham sat at her solitary breakfast-table rather later than usual, dawdling over the morning papers, and wondering drearily what she should do with the summer day before her. She had seen nothing of Gilbert Sinclair since the dinner, and had endured an agony of self-torment in the interval. His name appeared in one of the morning journals among the guests at a distinguished countess's ball on the previous evening, and in the list of names above Mr. Sinclair's she found those of Lord Clanyarde and his daughter. There had been a time when Gilbert set his face against all fashionable entertainments, voting them the abomination of desolation. He had changed of late, and went everywhere, raising fond hopes in the breasts of anxious mothers with large broods of marriageable daughters, waiting for their promotion.

Mrs. Walsingham sat for some time looking vacantly at the long list of names, and thinking of the man she loved. Yes, she loved him. She knew his character by heart, knew how nearly that obstinate selfish nature verged upon brutality, and loved him nevertheless. Something in the force of his character exercised a charm over her own ill-regulated mind. She had believed in the strength of his affection for herself, which had been shown in a passionate undisciplined kind of manner, that blinded her to the shallowness of the sentiment. She had been intensely proud of her power over this rough Hercules, all the more proud of his subjugation because of that half-hidden brutishness which she had long ago divined in him. She liked him for what he was, and scarcely wished him to be better than he was. She only wanted him to be true to her. When he had asked her, years ago, to be his wife, she had frankly told him the story of her youth and marriage. Her husband was five-and-twenty years her senior, a man with a constitution broken by nearly half a century of hard living, and she looked forward hopefully to a speedy release from a

union that had long been hateful to her. She had believed that it would be possible to retain Gilbert's affection until the time when that release should come without sacrifice of honour or reputation. Had she not believed and hoped this, it is impossible to say what guilty sacrifice she might not have been willing to make rather than lose the man she loved. She had hoped to keep him dangling on, governed by her womanly tact, a faithful slave, until the Colonel—who led a stormy kind of existence, wandering about the Continent, haunting German gaming-tables, and plucking English pigeons—should be good enough to depart this life. But the Colonel was a long time exhausting his battered constitution, and the flowery chain in which Mrs. Walsingham held her captive had faded considerably with the passage of years.

A loud double knock startled the lady from her reverie. Who could such an early visitor be? Gilbert himself, perhaps. He had one of those exceptional constitutions to which fatigue is a stranger, and would be no later astir to-day because of last night's ball. Her heart fluttered hopefully, but sank again with the familiar anguish of dis-

appointment as the door was opened and a low deferential voice made itself heard in the hall. Those courteous tones did not belong to Gilbert Sinclair.

A card was brought to her presently, with James Wyatt's name upon it, and 'On special business, with many apologies,' written in pencil below the name in the solicitor's neat hand.

'Shall I show the gentleman to the drawing-room, ma'am, or will you see him here?' asked the servant.

'Ask him to come in here. What special business can Mr. Wyatt have with me?' she wondered.

The solicitor came into the room as she asked herself this question, looking very fresh and bright in his careful morning costume. He was more careful of his toilet than many handsomer men, and knew how far the elegance of his figure and the perfection of his dress went to atone for his plain face.

'My dear Mrs. Walsingham,' he began, 'I owe you a thousand apologies for this unseasonable intrusion. If I did not think the nature of my business would excuse——'

'There is nothing to be excused. You find me guilty of a very late breakfast, that is all. Why should you not call at half-past ten as well as at half-past three? It is very kind of you to come at all.'

There was a tone of indifference in all this politeness, a half weary tone, which did not fail to strike James Wyatt. He had made this woman a study during the last year, and he knew every note of her voice, every expression of her face.

'I hold it one of my dearest privileges to be received by you,' he replied, with a certain grave tenderness. 'There are some men who do not know when they are happy, Mrs. Walsingham. I am not one of those.'

She looked at him with a surprise that was half scornful.

'Pray spare me the pretty speeches which make you so popular with other women,' she said. 'You spoke of business just now. Did you really mean business?'

'Not in a legal sense. My errand this morning is of rather a delicate nature. I would not for the

world distress or offend you by any unwarranted allusion to your domestic relations, but I believe I am the bearer of news which can scarcely have reached you yet by any other channel, and which may not be altogether unwelcome.'

'What news can you possibly bring me?' she asked, with a startled look.

'Would it distress you to hear that Colonel Walsingham is ill—dangerously ill, even?'

Her breath came quicker as he spoke.

'I am not hypocrite enough to pretend that,' she answered. 'My heart has long been dead to any feeling but anger—I will not say hatred, though he has deserved as much—where that man is concerned. I have suffered too much by my union with him.'

'Then let me be the first to congratulate you upon your release from bondage. Your husband is dead.'

Clara Walsingham's cheek blanched, and she was silent for some moments; and then she asked in a steady voice, 'How did you come by the news of his death?'

'In the simplest and most natural manner. My business requires me to be *au courant* as to Continental affairs, and I get several French and German newspapers. In one of the last I found the account of a duel, succeeding upon a quarrel at the gaming-table, in which your husband fell, shot through the lungs. He only survived a few hours. His opponent was a Frenchman, and is now under arrest. Shall I read you the paragraph?'

'If you please,' answered Mrs. Walsingham, with perfect calmness of manner. Her heart was beating tumultuously nevertheless. She had a dismal conviction that no advantage—that is to say, not that one advantage for which she longed—would come to her from her husband's death. How eagerly she had desired his death once! To-day the news gave her little satisfaction.

Mr. Wyatt took a slip of newspaper from his card-case, and read her the brief account of the Colonel's exit from this mortal strife. Duels were common enough at Hombourg in those days, and the journal made very little of the sanguinary business.

'As many of my friends believe me to have

been left a widow long ago I shall make no fuss about this event; and I shall be very grateful if you will be good enough not to talk of it anywhere, Mrs. Walsingham said, by and by, after a thoughtful pause.

'I shall be careful to obey you,' answered the lawyer.

'I wonder how you came to guess that I was not a widow, and that Colonel Walsingham was my husband? He took me abroad directly after our marriage, and we were never in England together.'

'It is a solicitor's business to know a great many things, and in this case there was a strong personal interest. You accused me just now of flattering women; and it is quite true that I have now and then amused myself a little with the weaker of your sex. Until about a year ago I believed myself incapable of any real feeling, of any strong attachment, and had made up my mind to a life of solitude, relieved by the frivolities of society. But at that time a marked change came over me, and I found that I too was doomed to suffer life's great fever.

In a word, I fell desperately in love. I think you can guess the rest.'

'I am not very good at guessing, but I suppose the lady is some friend of mine, or you would scarcely choose me for a confidante. Is it Sophy Morton? I know you admire her.'

'As I admire wax dolls, or the Haydees and Zuleikas of an illustrated Byron,' answered Mr. Wyatt, with a wry face. 'Sophy Morton would have about as much power to touch my heart or influence my mind as the wax dolls or the Byronic beauties. There is only one woman I have ever loved, or ever can love, and her name is Clara Walsingham.'

Mrs. Walsingham looked at him with unaffected surprise.

'Of course I ought to feel very much flattered by such a declaration on your part, Mr. Wyatt, if I could quite bring myself to believe in your sincerity.'

'Put me to the proof.'

'I cannot do that. I can only thank you for the honour you have done me, and regret that you should endanger the smooth course of our friendship

by that kind of declaration. I have learnt to rely upon you as a friend and an adviser, a thorough man of the world, and the last of mankind to lapse into sentimentality.'

'There is no sentimentality in the business, Mrs. Walsingham. I offer you a real and devoted affection, such an affection as a man feels but once in his life, and which a woman should scarcely reject without a thought of its value. I know I must seem at a disadvantage amongst the men who surround you, but they are men of the butterfly species, and I believe the best of them to be incapable of feeling as I feel for you. Yes, you are right when you call me a man of the world. It is to such men that love comes with its fullest force when it comes at all. I have not yielded weakly to the great master of mankind. I have counted the cost, and I know the devotion which I offer you to-day is as unalterable as it is profound.'

'I am sorry that I should have inspired any such sentiment, Mr. Wyatt. I can never return it.'

'Is that your irrevocable reply?'

'It is,' she answered, decisively.

'You reject the substance, an honest man's devoted love ; and yet you are content to waste the best years of your life upon a shadow.'

'I don't understand you.'

'Oh, yes, I think you do. I think you know as well as I do how frail a reed you have to lean on when you put your trust in Gilbert Sinclair.'

'You have no right to speak about Mr. Sinclair,' answered Clara Walsingham, with an indignant flush. 'What do you know of him, or of my feelings in relation to him ?'

'I know that you love him. Yes, Clara, it is the business of a friend to speak plainly, and even at the hazard of incurring your anger I will do so. Gilbert Sinclair is not worthy of your affection. You will know that I am right before long, if you do not know it now. It is not in that man's nature to be constant under difficulties, as I would be constant to you. Your hold upon him has been growing weaker every year.'

'If that is true I shall discover the fact quite soon enough from the gentleman himself,' replied Mrs. Walsingham, in a hard voice, and with an

angry cloud upon her face. 'Your friendship, as you call it, is not required to enlighten me upon a subject which scarcely comes within the province of a confidential solicitor. Yes, Mr. Wyatt, since plain speaking is to be the order of the day, I am weak enough and blind enough to care for Gilbert Sinclair, better than for any one else upon this earth, and if I do not marry him I shall never marry at all. He may intend to jilt me. Yes, I have seen the change in him. It would be a vain falsehood if I denied that. I have seen the change, and I am waiting for the inevitable day in which the man I once believed to be the soul of truth shall declare himself a traitor.'

'Would it not be wise to take the initiative, and give him his dismissal?'

'No. The wrong shall come from him. If he can be base enough to forget all the promises of the past, and to ignore the sacrifices I have made for him, his infamy shall have no excuse from any folly of mine.'

'And if you find that he is false to you—that he has transferred his affection to another

woman—you will banish him from your heart and mind, I trust, and begin life afresh.'

Mrs. Walsingham laughed aloud.

'Yes, I shall begin a new life, for from that hour I shall only live upon one hope.'

'And that will be——?'

'The hope of revenge.'

'My dear Mrs. Walsingham——!' remonstrated the lawyer.

'That sounds melodramatic, does it not? But you see there is a strong mixture of the melodramatic element in real life. Gilbert Sinclair should know that I am not a woman to be jilted with impunity. Of course I don't mean that I should poison him, or stab him. That sort of thing is un-English and obsolete; except among the labouring classes, who have a rapid way of taking payment for the wrongs that are done them. No; I should not kill him, but rely upon it I should make his life miserable.'

Mr. Wyatt watched her face with a thoughtful expression in his own. Yes, she looked the kind of woman whose anger would take some tangible,

and perhaps fatal form. She was not a woman to carry the burden of a broken heart in silent patience to the grave.

'Upon my life I should be afraid to offend her,' thought James Wyatt.

'Revenge is a bad word,' he said, after another long pause. 'Redress is much better. If Mr. Sinclair should marry, as I have some reason to think he will——'

'What reason?'

'Public rumour. His attentions to a certain young lady have been remarked by people I know.'

'The lady is the beautiful Miss Clanyarde.'

'How did you discover that?'

'From his face, the other night.'

'You are quick at reading his face. Yes, I believe he is over head and ears in love with Constance Clanyarde, as a much better man, Cyprian Davenant, was before him; and I have no doubt Lord Clanyarde will do his utmost to bring the match about.'

'How long has this been going on?'

'Since the beginning of this season. He may

have lost his heart to the lady last year, but his attentions last year were not so obvious.'

'Do you know if Miss Clanyarde cares for him?'

'I have no means of knowing the lady's feeling on the subject, but I have a considerable knowledge of her father, in the way of business; and I am convinced she will be made—induced is, I suppose, a more appropriate word—to accept Sinclair as a husband. Lord Clanyarde is as poor as Job, and as proud as Lucifer. Yes, I think we may look upon the marriage as a certainty. And now, Mrs. Walsingham, remember that by whatever means you seek redress I am your friend, and shall hold myself ready to aid and abet you in the exaction of your just right. You have rejected me as a husband. You shall discover how faithful I can be as an ally.'

'I don't quite understand the nature of the alliance you propose. Do you mean you will help me to come between that man and all hope of domestic happiness? You do not know how merciless I could be if chance gave me the power to punish Gilbert Sinclair's infidelity'

I know that he will deserve little compassion from you.'

'But from you? He has never injured you.'

'Do not be so sure of that. There are petty insults and trivial injuries that make up the sum of a great wrong. Gilbert Sinclair has not treated me well. I will not trouble you with the dry details of our business relations, but I have sufficient reasons for resentment, without reference to you. And now I will intrude upon you no longer. I see you are a little tired of this conversation. I only entreat you, once more, to remember that I am your friend.'

Mrs. Walsingham looked at him with a doubtful expression. He had subjugated her pride completely by the boldness of his attack. At another time she might have been angry with him, but the weariness of her spirit and the dull sense of impending sorrow were more powerful than anger. She only felt humiliated and perplexed by James Wyatt's proffers of love and friendship, uncertain how far he had been sincere in either offer.

I have no doubt I ought to be grateful to

you, Mr. Wyatt,' she said, in a slow weary way, 'but I do not think your friendship can ever be of much service to me in the future business of my life, and I trust that you will forget all that has been said this morning. Good-bye.'

She gave him her hand. He held it with a gentle pressure as he answered her,—

'It is impossible for me to forget anything that you have said, but you shall find me as secret as the grave. Good-bye.'

He bent his head, and touched her hand lightly with his lips before releasing it. In the next instant he was gone.

'How she loves that snob!' he said to himself as he walked away from Half-moon Street 'And how charming she is! Rich, too. I could scarcely make a better match. It is a case in which inclination and prudence go together. And how easily I might have won her, but for that man! Well, well, I don't despair of ultimate victory, in spite of Gilbert Sinclair. "Time and I against any two," as Philip of Spain used to say when things went badly in the Netherlands.'

CHAPTER V.

'TIME IS, TIME WAS.'

MRS. WALSINGHAM wrote to Gilbert Sinclair, immediately after Mr. Wyatt's departure, a few hasty lines begging him to come to her without delay.

'Something has occurred,' she wrote, 'an event of supreme importance to me. I will tell you nothing more till we meet.'

She despatched her groom to the Albany with this note, and then waited with intense impatience for Gilbert Sinclair's coming. If he were at home it was scarcely possible he could refuse to come to her.

'I shall know the worst very soon,' she said to herself, as she sat behind the flowers that shaded her window. 'After to-day there shall be no uncertainty between us—no further reservation on my part—no more acting on his. He

shall find that I am not his dupe, to be fooled to the top of my bent, and to be taken by surprise some fine morning by the announcement of his marriage in the *Times*.'

Mr. Sinclair was not at home when the note was delivered, but between two and three o'clock in the afternoon his thundering knock assailed the door, and he came into the room unannounced.

In spite of the previous night's ball he had ridden fifteen miles into the country that morning to attend a sale of hunters, and was looking flushed after his long ride.

'What on earth is the matter, Clara?' he asked. 'I have been out since eight o'clock. Poor Townley's stud was sold off this morning at a pretty little place he had beyond Barnet, and I rode down there to see if there was anything worth bidding for. I might have saved myself the trouble, for I never saw such a pack of screws. The ride was pleasant enough, however.'

'I wonder you were out so early after last night's dance.'

'Oh, you've seen my name down among the

swells,' he answered, with a forced laugh. 'Yes, I was hard at it last night, no end of waltzes and galops. But you know late hours never make much difference to me.'

'Was it a very pleasant party?'

'The usual thing—too many people for the rooms.'

'Your favourite, Miss Clanyarde, was there, I see.'

'Yes, the Clanyardes were there. But I suppose you haven't sent for me to ask me questions about Lady Deptford's ball? I thought by your letter something serious had happened.'

'Something serious has happened. My husband is dead.'

She said the words very slowly, with her eyes fixed on Gilbert Sinclair's face. The florid colour faded suddenly out of his cheeks, and left him ghastly pale. Of all the events within the range of probability this was the last he had expected to hear of, and the most unwelcome.

'Indeed,' he stammered, after an awkward pause. 'I suppose I ought to congratulate you on the recovery of your freedom?'

'I am very glad to be free.'

'What did he die of—Colonel Walsingham? And how did you get the news?'

'From a foreign paper. He was killed in a duel.'

And then she repeated the contents of the paragraph James Wyatt had read to her.

'Is the news correct, do you think? No mistake about the identity of the person in question?'

'None whatever, I am convinced. However, I shall drive into the City presently, and see the solicitor who arranged our separation. I know the Colonel was in the habit of corresponding with him, and no doubt he will be able to give me official intelligence of the event.'

After this there came another pause, more awkward than the first. Gilbert sat with his eyes fixed upon the carpet, tracing out the figures of it meditatively with the ferrule of his cane, with an air of study as profound as if he had been an art designer bent upon achieving some novel combination of form and colour. Clara Walsingham sat opposite to him, waiting for him to speak, with a

pale, rigid face, that grew more stony as the silence continued. That silence became at last quite unendurable, and Gilbert felt himself obliged to say something, no matter what.

'Does this business make any alteration in your circumstances?' he asked, with a faint show of interest.

'Only for the better. I surrendered to the Colonel the income of one of the estates my father left me, in order to bribe him into consenting to a separation. Henceforward that income will be mine. My poor father took pains to secure me from the possibility of being ruined by a husband. My fortune was wholly at my own disposal, but I was willing to make the surrender in question in exchange for my liberty.'

'I am glad to find you will be so well off,' said Mr. Sinclair, still engrossed by the pattern of the carpet.

'Is that all you have to say?'

'What more can I say upon the subject?'

'There was a time when you would have said a great deal more.'

'Very likely,' answered Gilbert, bluntly; 'but then you see that time is past and gone. What is it Friar Bacon's brazen head said—"Time is, time was, time's past." Come, Clara, it is very little use for you and me to play at cross purposes. Why did you send for me in such hot haste to tell me of your husband's death?'

'Because I had reason to consider the news would be as welcome to you as it was to me.'

'That might have been so if the event had happened a year or two ago; unhappily your release comes too late for my welfare. You accused me the other day of intending to jilt you. I think that accusation scarcely fair, when it is remembered how long I was contented to remain your devoted slave, patiently waiting for something better than slavery. There is a limit to all things, however, and I confess the bondage became a little irksome at last, and I began to look in other directions for the happiness of my future life.'

'Does that mean that you are going to be married?'

'It does.'

'The lady is Miss Clanyarde, I conclude,' said Mrs. Walsingham. Her breathing was a little hurried, but there was no other sign of the storm that raged within.

'Yes, the lady is Constance Clanyarde. And now, my dear Clara, let me entreat you to be reasonable, and to consider how long I waited for the chance that has come at last too late to be of any avail, so far as I am concerned. I am not coxcomb enough to fear that you will regret me very much, and I am sure you know that I shall always regard you with the warmest friendship and admiration. With your splendid attractions you will have plenty of opportunities in the matrimonial line, and will have, I dare say, little reason to lament my secession.'

Clara Walsingham looked at him with unutterable scorn.

'And I once gave you credit for a heart, Gilbert Sinclair,' she said. 'Well, the dream is ended.'

'Don't let us part ill friends, Clara. Say you wish me well in my new life.'

'I cannot say anything so false. No, Gilbert,

I will not take your hand. There can be no such thing as friendship between you and me.'

'That seems rather hard,' answered Sinclair, in a sulky tone. 'But let it be as you please. Good-bye.'

'Good morning, Mr. Sinclair.'

Mrs. Walsingham rang the bell, but before her summons could be answered, Gilbert Sinclair had gone out of the house. He walked back to the Albany in a very gloomy frame of mind, thinking it a hard thing that Colonel Walsingham should have chosen this particular time for his death. He was glad that the interview was over, and that Clara knew what she had to expect; but he felt an uneasy sense that he had not altogether extricated himself from an awkward entanglement.

'She took it pretty quietly upon the whole,' he said to himself, 'but there was a look in her eyes that I didn't like.'

Mrs. Walsingham called on her late husband's lawyer in the course of the afternoon, and received a confirmation of James Wyatt's news. Her husband's death increased her income from two to

three thousand a year, arising chiefly from landed property which had been purchased by her father, a city tradesman, who had late in life conceived the idea of becoming a country squire, and had died of the dulness incident upon an unrecognised position in the depths of an agricultural district. His only daughter's marriage with Colonel Walsingham had been a severe affliction to him, but he had taken care to settle his money upon her in such a manner as to secure it from any serious depredations on the part of the husband.

CHAPTER VI.

'ARISE, BLACK VENGEANCE, FROM THY HOLLOW CELL.'

THE summer had melted into autumn, the London season was over, and the Clanyardes had left their furnished house in Eaton Place, which the Viscount had taken for the season, to return to Marchbrook, where Gilbert Sinclair was to follow them as a visitor. He had proposed for Constance, and had been accepted, with much inward rejoicing on the part of the lady's father; with a strange conflict of feeling in the mind of the lady herself.

Did she love the man she had promised to marry? Well, no, there was no such feeling as love for Gilbert Sinclair in her mind. She thought him tolerably good-looking, and not exactly disagreeable, and it had been impressed upon her that he was one of the richest men in England, a man who could bestow upon her everything which a well-bred young lady must, by nature and edu-

cation, desire. The bitter pinch of poverty had been severely felt at Marchbrook, and the Clanyarde girls had been taught, in an indirect kind of way that they were bound to contribute to the restoration of the family fortunes by judicious marriages. The two elder girls, Adela and Margaret, had married well,—one Sir Henry Elrington, a Sussex baronet, with a very nice place, and a comfortable income, the other a rich East Indian merchant, considerably past middle age. But the fortunes of Sir Henry Elrington and Mr. Campion, the merchant, were as nothing compared with the wealth of Gilbert Sinclair; and Lord Clanyarde told his daughter Constance that she would put her sisters to shame by the brilliancy of her marriage. He flew into a terrible passion when she expressed herself disinclined to accept Mr. Sinclair's offer, and asked her how she dared to fly in the face of Providence by refusing such a splendid destiny. What in heaven's name did she expect? A girl without a sixpence of her own, and with nothing but her pretty face and aristocratic lineage to recommend her. Then came the two married

sisters with more lecturing and persuasion, and at last the girl gave way, fairly wearied out, and suffered herself to be scolded into a kind of desponding submission.

So Gilbert Sinclair came one morning to Eaton Place, and finding Miss Clanyarde alone in the drawing-room, made her a solemn offer of his heart and hand. He had asked her to be his wife before this, and she had put him off with an answer that was almost a refusal. Then had come the scolding and lecturing, and she had been schooled into resignation to a fate that seemed to her irresistible. She told her suitor that she accepted him in deference to her father's wishes, and that she could give him nothing better than duty and gratitude in return for the affection he was so good as to entertain for her. This was enough for Gilbert, who was bent on winning her for his wife, in a headstrong, reckless spirit, that made no count of the cost. He put down this speech of Constance's to girlish modesty. She couldn't help being fond of him, he thought, when he was so fond of her, and such a good-looking fellow into the bargain.

He was not at all inclined to undervalue his own merits, or to suppose that any woman could feel indifferent to him. Had not Clara Walsingham loved him with an inconvenient devotedness? But as Miss Clanyarde sat by and by with her hand in her lover's, and listened to his protestations of affection, there rose before her the vision of a face that was not Gilbert Sinclair's—a darkly splendid face, that had looked upon her with such unutterable love one summer day in the shadowy Kentish lane; and she wished that Cyprian Davenant had carried her off to some strange, desolate land, in which they might have lived and died together.

'What will he think of me when he hears that I have sold myself to this man for the sake of his fortune?' she asked herself; and then she looked up at Gilbert's face and wondered whether she could ever teach herself to love him, or to be grateful to him for his love.

All this had happened within a week of Gilbert's final interview with Mrs. Walsingham, and in a very short time the fact of Mr. Sinclair's

engagement to Miss Clanyarde was pretty well known to all that gentleman's friends and acquaintance. He was very proud of carrying off a girl whose beauty had made a considerable sensation in the two past seasons, and he talked of his matrimonial projects in a swaggering, boastful way, that was eminently distasteful to some of his acquaintance. Men who were familiar with Mr. Sinclair's antecedents shrugged their shoulders ominously when his marriage was discussed, and augured ill for the future happiness of Miss Clanyarde.

James Wyatt was one of the first to congratulate him upon his betrothal.

'Yes,' answered Gilbert, 'she's a lovely girl, isn't she? and of course I'm very proud of her affection. It's to be a regular love match, you know. I wouldn't marry the handsomest woman in the world if I thought she were marrying me for my money. I don't say the father hasn't an eye to the main chance. He's a thorough man of the world, and of course fully alive to that kind of thing. But Constance is superior to any such

consideration. If I didn't believe that, I wouldn't be such a fool as to stake my happiness on the venture.'

'I scarcely fancied you would look at matters from such a sentimental point of view,' said Mr. Wyatt, thoughtfully, 'especially as this is by no means your first love.'

'It is the first love worth speaking of,' answered the other. 'I never knew what it was to be passionately in love till I met Constance Clanyarde.'

'Not with Mrs. Walsingham?'

'No, Jim. I did care for her, a good deal, once upon a time, but never as I care for Constance. I think if that girl were to play me false I should kill myself. By the way, I'm sure you know more about Sir Cyprian Davenant than you were inclined to confess the other night. I fancy there was some kind of love affair—some youthful flirtation between him and Constance. You might as well tell me everything you know about it.'

'I know nothing about Miss Clanyarde, and I can tell you nothing about Davenant. He and I

are old friends, and I am too fully in his confidence to talk of his sentiments, or his affairs.'

'What a confounded prig you are, Wyatt! But you can't deny that Davenant was in love with Constance. I don't believe she has ever cared a straw for him, however, and if he should live to come back to England I shall take good care he never darkens my doors. How about that place of his, by-the-bye? Is it in the market?'

'Yes, I have received Sir Cyprian's instructions to sell whenever I see a favourable opportunity. He won't profit much by the sale, poor fellow, for the Davenant estate is mortgaged up to the hilt.'

'I'll look at the place while I'm at Marchbrook, and if I like it I may make you an offer. We shall want something nearer town than the barrack my father built in the north, but I shall not give up that either.'

'You can afford a couple of country seats. You will have a house in town, of course?'

'Yes, I have been thinking of Park Lane; but it is so difficult to get anything there. I've told

the agents what I want, however, and I dare say they'll find something before long.'

'When are you to be married?'

'Not later than October, I hope. There is not the shadow of a reason for delay.'

At Marchbrook everything went pleasantly enough with the plighted lovers. Lord Clanyarde had filled the house with company, and his youngest daughter had very little time for reflection or regret upon the subject of her approaching marriage. Everybody congratulated her upon her conquest, and praised Gilbert Sinclair with such a show of enthusiasm that she began to think he must be worthy of a warmer regard than she was yet able to feel for him. She told herself that in common gratitude she was bound to return his affection, and she tried her utmost to please him by a ready submission to all his wishes; but the long drives and rides, in which they were always side by side, were very wearisome to her, nor could his gayest talk of the future, the houses, the yacht, the carriages and horses that were to be hers, inspired her with any expectation of happiness.

They rode over to Davenant with Lord Clanyarde one morning, and explored the old house, Gilbert looking at everything in a business-like spirit, which jarred a little upon Constance. She could not but remember that luckless exile who had loved the place so well.

Her lover consulted her about the disposition of the rooms, the colours of the new draperies, and the style of the furniture.

'We'll get rid of the gloomy old tapestry, and have everything modern and bright,' he said; but Lord Clanyarde pleaded hard for the preservation of the tapestry, which was very fine and in excellent condition.

'Oh, very well,' answered Gilbert, carelessly. 'In that case we'll keep the tapestry. I suppose the best plan will be to get some first-class London man to furnish the house. Those fellows always have good taste. But of course he must defer to you in all matters, Constance.'

'You are very good,' she returned, listlessly. 'But I don't think there will be any necessity for my interference.'

'Don't say that, Constance. That looks as if you were not interested in the subject,' Gilbert said, with rather a discontented air.

The listlessness of manner which his betrothed so often displayed was by no means pleasing to him. There was a disagreeable suspicion growing in his mind that Miss Clanyarde's heart had not quite gone with her acceptance of his offer, that family influences had something to do with her consent to become his wife. He was not the less resolved on this account to hold her to her promise; but his selfish tyrannical nature resented her coldness, and he was determined that the balance should be adjusted between them in the future.

'Perhaps you don't like this place, Constance,' he said presently, after watching her thoughtful face for some minutes in silence.

'Oh, yes, Gilbert, I am very fond of Davenant. I have known it all my life, you know.'

'Then I wish you'd look a little more cheerful about my intended purchase. I thought it would please you to have a country house so near your own family.'

'And it does please her very much, I am sure, Sinclair,' said Lord Clanyarde, with a stealthy frown at his daughter. 'She cannot fail to appreciate the kindness and delicacy of your choice.'

'Papa is quite right, Gilbert,' added Constance. 'I should be very ungrateful if I were not pleased with your kindness.'

After this she tried her utmost to sustain an appearance of interest in the discussion of furniture and decorations; but every now and then she found her mind wandering away to the banished owner of those rooms, and she wished that Gilbert Sinclair had chosen any other habitation upon this earth for her future home.

October came, and with it the inevitable day which was to witness one more perjury from the lips of a bride. The wedding took place at the little village church near Marchbrook, and was altogether a very brilliant affair, attended by all the relatives of the Clanyarde family, who were numerous, and by a great many acquaintances of bride and bridegroom. Notable among the friends of the latter was James Wyatt, the solicitor who had been employed

in the drawing up of the marriage settlement, which was a most liberal one, and highly satisfactory to Viscount Clanyarde. Mr. Wyatt made himself excessively agreeable at the breakfast, and was amazingly popular among the bridesmaids. He did not long avail himself of the Marchbrook hospitalities, but went quietly back to town by rail almost immediately after the departure of the newly married couple on their honeymoon trip to the Italian lakes. He had an engagement in Half-moon Street that evening at eight o'clock.

The neighbouring clocks were striking the hour as he knocked at the door. Mrs. Walsingham was quite alone in the drawing-room, and looked unusually pale in the light of the lamps. The solicitor shook his head reproachfully as he pressed her hand.

'This is very sad,' he murmured, in a semi-paternal manner. 'You have been worrying yourself all day long, I know. You are as pale as a ghost.'

'I am a little tired, that is all.'

'You have been out to-day? You told me you should not stir from the house.'

'I changed my mind at the last moment. Anything was better than staying at home keeping the day like a black fast. Besides, I wanted to see how Gilbert and his bride would look at the altar.'

'You have been down to Kent?'

'Yes, I was behind the curtains of the organ loft. The business was easily managed by means of a sovereign to the clerk. I wore my plainest dress and a thick veil, so there was very little risk of detection.'

'What folly!' exclaimed Wyatt.

'Yes, it was great folly, no doubt, but it is the nature of women to be foolish. And now tell me all about the wedding. Did Gilbert look very happy?'

'He looked like a man who has got his own way, and who cares very little what price he has paid, or may have to pay, for the getting it.'

'And do you think he will be happy?'

'Not if his happiness depends upon the love of his wife.'

'Then you don't think she loves him?'

'I am sure she does not. I made a study of her face during the ceremony and afterwards; and if

ever a woman sold herself, or was sold by her people, this woman is guilty of such a bargain.'

'Perhaps you say this to please me,' said Clara doubtfully.

'I do not, Mrs. Walsingham. I am convinced that this affair has been brought about by Lord Clanyarde's necessities, and not the young lady's choice. But I doubt whether this will make much difference to Gilbert in the long run. He is not a man of fine feelings, you know, and I think he will be satisfied with the fact of having won the woman he wanted to marry. I should fancy matters would go smoothly enough with him, so long as he sees no cause for jealousy. He would be rather an ugly customer if he took it into his head to be jealous.'

'And you think his life will go smoothly,' said Clara, 'and that he will go on to the end unpunished for his perfidy to me?'

'What good would his punishment be to you?'

'It would be all the world to me.'

'And if I could bring about the retribution you desire—if it were in my power to avenge your wrongs—what reward would you give me?'

She hesitated for a moment, knowing there was only one reward he was likely to claim from her.

'If you were a poor man I would offer you two-thirds of my fortune,' she said.

'But you know that I am not a poor man. If I can come to you some day, and tell you that Gilbert Sinclair and his wife are parted for ever, will you accept me for your husband?'

'Yes,' she answered, suddenly. 'Break the knot between those two—let me be assured that he has lost the woman for whose sake he jilted me, and I will refuse you nothing.'

'Consider it done. There is nothing in the world I would not achieve to win you for my wife.'

CHAPTER VII.

'GREEN-EYED JEALOUSY!'

It was not till the early spring that Mr. and Mrs Sinclair returned to England. They had spent the winter in Rome, where Gilbert had found some congenial friends, and where their time had been occupied in one perpetual round of gaiety and dissipation. Constance had shown a great taste for pleasure since her marriage. She seemed to know no weariness of visiting and being visited; and people who remembered her in her girlish days were surprised to find what a thorough woman of the world she had become. Nor was Gilbert displeased that it should be so. He liked to see his wife occupy a prominent position in society, and having no taste himself for the pleasures of the domestic hearth, he was neither surprised nor vexed by Constance's indifference to her home. Of course it would all be different at Davenant Park. There would be plenty of home

life there—a little too much, perhaps, Gilbert thought with a yawn.

They had been married nearly four months, and there had not been the shadow of disagreement between them. Constance's manner to her husband was amiability itself. She treated him a little *de haut en bas* it is true, made her own plans for the most part without reference to him, and graciously informed him of her arrangements after they were completed. But then, on the other hand, she never objected to his disposal of his time, was never exacting, or jealous, or capricious, as Clara Walsingham had been. She was always agreeable to his friends, and was eminently popular with all of them. So Gilbert Sinclair was, upon the whole, perfectly satisfied with the result of his marriage, and had no fear of evil days in the future. What James Wyatt had said of him was perfectly true. He was not gifted with very fine feelings, and that sense of something wanting in such a union, which would have disturbed the mind of a nobler man, did not trouble him.

They returned to England early in February,

and went at once to Davenant, which had been furnished in the modern mediæval style by a West End upholsterer. The staff of servants had been provided by Lady Elrington, who had come up to London on purpose, and had bestowed much pains and labour upon the task of selection, bitterly bewailing the degeneracy of the race she had to deal with during the performance of this difficult service. All was ready when Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair arrived. A pompous housekeeper simpered and curtseyed in the hall; an accomplished cook hovered tenderly over the roasts and the stew-pans in the great kitchen; housemaids in smart caps flitted about the passages and poked the fires in bedroom and dressing-rooms, bath-rooms and morning-room, eager to get an early look at their new lady; a butler of the usual clerical appearance ushered the way to the lamp-lit drawing-room, while two ponderous footmen conveyed the rugs and newspapers and morocco bags from the carriage, leaving all the heavier luggage to the care of unknown underlings attached to the stable department. Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair dined alone upon this first evening

of their return, under the inspection of the clerical butler and the two ponderous footmen. They talked chiefly about the house, which rooms were most successful in their new arrangement, and so on ; a little about what they had been doing in Rome ; and a little about their plans for the next month ; what guests were to be invited, and what rooms they were to occupy. It was all the most conventional talk, but the three serving-men retired with the impression that Gilbert Sinclair and his wife were a very happy couple, and reported to that effect in the housekeeper's room and the servants' hall.

Before the week had ended the great house was full of company. That feverish desire for gaiety and change, which had seemed a part of Constance's nature since her marriage, in no way subsided on her arrival at Davenant. She appeared to exist for pleasure, and pleasure only, and her guests declared her the most charming hostess that ever reigned over a country house. Lavish as he was, Mr. Sinclair opened his eyes to their widest extent when he perceived his wife's capacity for spending money.

'It's rather lucky for you that you didn't marry

a poor man, Constance,' he said, with a boastful laugh.

She looked at him for a moment with a strange expression, and then turned very pale.

'I should not have been afraid to face poverty,' she said, 'if it had been my fate to do so.'

'If you could have faced it with the man you liked, eh, Constance? That's about what you mean, isn't it?'

'Is this intended for a complaint, Gilbert?' his wife asked, in her coldest tones. 'Have I been spending too much money?'

'No, no, I didn't mean that. I was only congratulating you upon your fitness for the position of a rich man's wife.'

This was the first little outbreak of jealousy of which Gilbert Sinclair had been guilty. He knew now that his wife did not love him, that his conquest had been achieved through the influence of her family, and he was almost angry with himself for being so fond of her. He could not forget those vague hints that had been dropped about Sir Cyprian Davenant, and was tormented by the idea

that James Wyatt knew a great deal more than he had revealed upon this point. This hidden jealousy had been at the bottom of his purchase of the Davenant estate. He took a savage pride in reigning over the little kingdom from which his rival had been deposed.

Among the visitors from London appeared Mr. Wyatt, always unobtrusive, and always useful. He contrived to ingratiate himself very rapidly in Mrs. Sinclair's favour, and established himself as a kind of adjutant in her household corps, always ready with advice upon every social subject, from the costumes in a *tableau vivant* to the composition of the *menu* for a dinner party. Constance did not particluarly like him; but she lived in a world in which it is not necessary to have a very sincere regard for one's acquaintance; and she considered him an agreeable person, much to be preferred to the generality of her husband's chosen companions, who were men without a thought beyond the hunting-field and the racecourse.

Mr. Wyatt, on his part, was a little surprised to see the manner in which Lord Clanyarde's daughter

filled her new position, the unfailing vivacity which she displayed in the performance of her duties as hostess, and the excellent terms upon which she appeared to live with her husband. He was accustomed, however, to look below the surface of things, and by the time he had been a fortnight at Davenant he had discovered that all this brightness and gaiety on the part of the wife indicated an artificial state of being, which was very far from real happiness, and that there was a growing sense of disappointment on the part of the husband.

He was not in the habit of standing upon much ceremony in his intercourse with Gilbert Sinclair, and on the first convenient occasion questioned him with blunt directness upon the subject of his marriage.

'I hope the alliance has brought you all the happiness you anticipated,' he said.

'Oh, yes, Jim,' Mr. Sinclair answered, rather moodily, 'my wife suits me pretty well. We get on very well together. She's a little too fond of playing the woman of fashion; but she'll get tired of that in time, I dare say. I'm fond of society myself, you

know, couldn't lead a solitary life for any woman in Christendom; but I should like a wife who seemed to care a little more for my company, and was not always occupied with other people. I don't think we have dined alone a dozen times since we were married.'

It was within a few days of this conversation that Mr. Wyatt gratified himself by the performance of a little experiment which he had devised in the comfortable retirement of his bachelor room at Davenant. He had come into Mrs. Sinclair's morning-room after breakfast to consult her upon the details of an amateur dramatic performance that was to take place shortly, and had, for a wonder, found the husband and wife alone together.

'Perhaps we'd better discuss the business at some other time,' he said. 'I know Sinclair doesn't care much about this sort of thing.'

'Is that your theatrical rubbish?' asked Gilbert. 'You'd better say what you've got to say about it. You needn't mind me. I can absorb myself in the study of *Bell's Life* for a quarter of an hour or so.'

He withdrew to one of the windows, and read his

newspaper, while James Wyatt showed Constance the books of some farces that had just come to him by post, and discussed the fitness of each for drawing-room representation.

'Every amateur in polite society believes himself able to play Charles Mathews's business,' he said, laughing. 'It is a fixed delusion of the human mind. Of course we shall set them all by the ears, do what we may. Perhaps it would be better to let them draw lots for the characters, or we might put the light comedy parts up to auction, and send the proceeds to the poor box.'

He ran on in this strain gaily enough, writing lists of the characters and pieces, and putting down the names of the guests with a rapid pen as he talked, until Gilbert Sinclair threw down his newspaper and came over to the fireplace, politely requesting his friend to 'stop that row.'

It was a hopelessly wet morning, and the master of Davenant was sorely at a loss for amusement and occupation. He had come to his wife's room in rather a defiant spirit, determined that she should favour him with a little more of her society than it

was her habit to give him, and he had found her writing letters, which she declared were imperative, and had sat by the fire waiting for her correspondence to be finished, in a very sulky mood.

'What's the last news, Wyatt?' he asked, poking the fire savagely. 'Anything stirring in London?'

'Nothing—in London. There is some news of an old friend of mine who's far away from London—news I don't altogether like.'

'Some client who has bolted, in order to swindle you out of a long bill of costs, I suppose,' answered Gilbert, indifferently.

'No, the friend I am talking of is a gentleman we all know—the late owner of this place.'

'Sir Cyprian Davenant?' cried Gilbert.

Constance looked up from her writing.

'Sir Cyprian Davenant,' repeated James Wyatt.

'Has anything happened to him?'

'About the last and worst thing that can happen to any man, I fear,' answered the lawyer. 'For some time since there have been no reports of Captain Harcourt's expedition; and that, in a negative way, was about as bad as it could be. But in a letter I

received this morning, from a member of the Geographical Society, there is worse news. My friend tells me there is a very general belief that Harcourt and his party have been made away with by the natives. Of course this is only club gossip as yet, and I trust that it may turn out a false alarm.'

Constance had dropped her pen, making a great blot upon the page. She was very pale, and her hands were clasped nervously upon the table before her. Gilbert watched her with eager angry eyes. It was just such an opportunity as he had wished for. He wanted above all things to satisfy his doubts about that man.

'I don't see that it much matters whether the report is true or false,' he said, 'as far as Davenant is concerned. The fellow was a scamp, and only left England because he had spent his last sixpence in dissipation.'

'I beg your pardon, Sinclair,' remonstrated Mr. Wyatt, 'the Davenant property was impoverished by Cyprian's father and grandfather. I don't say that he was not extravagant himself at one period of his life, but he had reformed long before he left England.'

'Reformed, yes, when he had no more money to spend. That's a common kind of reform. However, I suppose you've profited so much by his ruin that you can afford to praise him.'

'Hadn't you better ring the bell?' asked James Wyatt, quietly, 'I think Mrs. Sinclair has fainted.'

He was right, Constance Sinclair's head had fallen back upon the cushion of her chair, and her eyes were closed. Gilbert ran across to her, and seized her hand. It was deadly cold.

'Yes,' he said, 'she has fainted. Sir Cyprian was an old friend of hers. You know that better than I do, though you have never chosen to tell me the truth. And now, I suppose, you have trumped up this story in order to let me see what a fool I have been.'

'It is not a trumped-up story,' returned the other. 'It is the common talk amongst men who know the travellers and their line of country.'

'Then for your friend's sake it is to be hoped it's true.'

'Why so?'

'Because if he has escaped those black fellows to

come my way it will be so much the worse for both of us; for as sure as there is a sky above us, if he and I meet I shall kill him.'

'Bah!' muttered Mr. Wyatt, contemptuously, 'we don't live in the age for that sort of thing. Here comes your wife's maid; I'll get out of the way. Pray apologize to Mrs. Sinclair for my indiscretion in forgetting that Sir Cyprian was a friend of her family. It was only natural that she should be affected by the news.'

The lawyer went away as the maid came into the room. His face was brightened by a satisfied smile as he walked slowly along the corridor leading to the billiard-room.

'I think this fellow is made of the right kind of stuff for an Othello,' he said to himself. 'I've fired the train. If the news I heard is true, and Davenant is on his way home, there'll be nice work by and by.'

CHAPTER VIII.

'HAD YOU LOVED ME ONCE AS YOU HAVE NOT LOVED!'

GILBERT SINCLAIR said very little to his wife about the fainting fit. She was herself perfectly candid upon the subject. Sir Cyprian was an old friend—a friend whom she had known and liked ever since her childhood—and Mr. Wyatt's news had quite overcome her. She did not seem to consider it necessary to apologize for her emotion.

'I have been over-exerting myself a little lately, or I should scarcely have fainted, however sorry I felt,' she said quietly, and Gilbert wondered at her self-possession, but was not the less convinced that she had loved—that she did still love—Cyprian Davenant. He watched her closely after this to see if he could detect any signs of hidden grief, but her manner in society had lost none of its brightness; and when the Harcourt expedition was next spoken of she bore her part in the conversation with perfect ease.

Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair left Davenant early in May for a charming house in Park Lane, furnished throughout with delicate tints of white and green, like a daisy-sprinkled meadow in early spring, a style in which the upholsterer had allowed full scope to the poetry of his own nature, bearing in mind that the house was to be occupied by a newly married couple. Mrs. Sinclair declared herself perfectly satisfied with the house, and Mrs. Sinclair's friends were in raptures with it. She instituted a Thursday evening supper after the opera, which was an immense success, and enjoyed a popularity in her new position of matron that excited some envy on the part of unmarried beauties. Mrs. Walsingham heard of the Thursday evening parties, and saw her beautiful rival very often at the opera; but she heard from James Wyatt that Gilbert Sinclair spent a great deal of time at his club, and made a point of attending all the race meetings, habits that did not augur very well for his domestic happiness.

'He will grow tired of her, as he did of me,' thought Clara Walsingham.

But Gilbert was in no way weary of his wife. He

loved her as passionately as he had loved her at the first; with an exacting and selfish passion, it is true, but with all the intensity of which his nature was capable. If he had lived in the good old feudal days, when a man could do what he liked with his wife, he would have shut her up in some lonely turret, where no one but himself could approach her. He knew that she did not love him; and with his own affection for her there was always mingled an angry sense of her coldness and ingratitude.

The London season came to an end once more, and Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair went back to Davenant. Nothing had been heard of Sir Cyprian or his companions throughout the summer, and Gilbert had ceased to trouble himself about his absent rival. The man was dead, in all probability, and it was something more than folly to waste a thought upon him. So things went on quietly enough, until the early spring gave a baby daughter to the master of Davenant, much to his disappointment, as he ardently desired a son and heir.

The birth of this infant brought a new sense of joy to the mind of Constance Sinclair. She had not

thought it possible that the child could give her so much happiness. She devoted herself to her baby with a tenderness which was at first very pleasing to her husband, but which became by and by distasteful to him. He grew jealous of the child's power to evoke so much affection from one who had never given him the love he longed for. The existence of his daughter seemed to bring him no nearer to his wife. The time and attention which she had given to society she now gave to her child; but her husband was no more to her than he had ever been,—a little less perhaps, as he told himself angrily, in the course of his gloomy meditations.

Mrs. Walsingham read the announcement of the infant's birth, in extreme bitterness of spirit, and when James Wyatt next called upon her she asked him what had become of his promise that those two should be parted by his agency.

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly. 'I did not tell you that the parting should take place within any given time,' he said, 'but it shall go hard with me if I do not keep my promise sooner or later.

He had not been idle. The wicked work which

he had set himself to do had progressed considerably. It was he who always contrived, in a subtle manner, to remind Gilbert Sinclair of his wife's coldness towards her husband, and to hint at her affection for another, while seeming to praise and defend her. Throughout their acquaintance his wealthy client had treated him with a selfish indifference and a cool unconscious insolence that had galled him to the quick, and he took a malicious pleasure in the discomfiture which Sinclair had brought upon himself by his marriage. When the Sinclairs returned to London, some months after the birth of the child, James Wyatt contrived to make himself more than ever necessary to Gilbert, who had taken to play higher than of old, and who now spent four evenings out of the six lawful days at a notorious whist club, sitting at the card-table till the morning sun shone through the chinks in the shutters. Mr. Wyatt was a member of the same club, but too cautious a player for the set which Gilbert now affected.

'That fellow is going to the bad in every way,' the lawyer said to himself. 'If Clara Walsingham

wants to see him ruined she is likely to have her wish without any direct interference of mine.'

The state of affairs in Park Lane was indeed far from satisfactory. Gilbert had grown tired of playing the indulgent husband, and the inherent brutality of his nature had on more than one occasion displayed itself in angry disputes with his wife, whose will he now seemed to take a pleasure in thwarting, even in trifles. He complained of her present extravagance, with insolent reference to the poverty of her girlhood, and asked savagely if she thought his fortune could stand for ever against her expensive follies.

'I don't think my follies are so likely to exhaust your income as your increasing taste for horse-racing, Gilbert,' she answered, coolly. 'What is to be the cost of these racing stables you are building near Newmarket? I heard you, and that dreadful man your trainer, talking of the tan gallop the other day and it seemed to me altogether rather an expensive affair, especially as your horses have such a knack of getting beaten. It is most gentlemanlike of you to remind me of my poverty. Yes, I was very poor in my girlhood,—and very happy.'

'And since you've married me you've been miserable. Pleasant, upon my soul! You'd have married that fellow Cyprian Davenant and lived in a ten-roomed house in the suburbs, with a maid of all work to wait upon you, and called that happiness, I suppose?'

'If I had married Sir Cyprian Davenant I should at least have been the wife of a gentleman,' replied Constance.

This was not the first time that Gilbert had mentioned Cyprian Davenant of late. A report of the missing travellers had appeared in one of the newspapers, and their friends began to hope for their safe return. Gilbert Sinclair brooded over this probable return in a savage frame of mind, but did not communicate his thoughts on the subject to his usual confidant, Mr. Wyatt, who thereupon opined that those thoughts were more than ordinarily bitter.

Before the London season was over Mr. Sinclair had occasion to attend a rather insignificant meeting in Yorkshire where a two-year-old filly, from which he expected great things in the future, was to try her strength in a handicap race. He came home by way of Newmarket, where he spent a few days pleasantly

enough in the supervision of his new buildings, and he had been absent altogether a week when he returned to Park Lane.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when he drove up to his own house in a hansom. He found his wife in the drawing-room, occupied with several visitors, amongst whom appeared a tall figure which he remembered only too well. It was Sir Cyprian Davenant, bronzed with travel, and looking handsomer than when he left London.

Gilbert stood at gaze for a moment, confounded by the surprise, and then went through the ceremony of handshaking with his wife's guests in a somewhat embarrassed manner.

Constance received him with her usual cool politeness, and he felt himself altogether at a disadvantage in the presence of the man he feared and hated. He seated himself, however, determined to see the end of this obnoxious visit, and remained moodily silent until the callers had dropped off one by one, Sir Cyprian among the earliest departures.

Gilbert turned savagely upon his wife directly the room was clear.

'So your old favourite has lost no time in renewing his intimacy with you,' he said. 'I came home at rather an awkward moment, I fancy.'

'I did not perceive any particular awkwardness in your return,' his wife answered, coolly, 'unless it was your own manner to my friends, which was a little calculated to give them the idea that you scarcely felt at home in your own house.'

'There was some one here who seemed a little too much at home, Mrs. Sinclair; some one who will find my presence a good deal more awkward if I should happen to find him here again. In plain words, I forbid you to receive Sir Cyprian Davenant in my house.'

'I can no more close my doors upon Sir Cyprian Davenant than on any other visitor,' replied Constance, 'and I do not choose to insult an old friend of my family for the gratification of your senseless jealousy.'

'Then you mean to defy me?'

'There is no question of defiance. I shall do what I consider right, without reference to this absurd fancy of yours. Sir Cyprian is not very likely

to call upon me again, unless you cultivate his acquaintance.'

'I am not very likely to do that,' Gilbert answered, savagely. His wife's tranquillity baffled him, and he could find nothing more to say for himself. But this jealousy of Sir Cyprian was in no manner abated by Constance's self-possession. He remembered the fainting fit in the morning-room at Davenant, and he was determined to find some means of punishing her for her secret preference for this man. An ugly notion flashed across his mind by and by as he saw her with her child lying in her lap, bending over the infant with a look of supreme affection.

'She can find love for everything in the world except me,' he said to himself, bitterly. He had ceased to care for the child after the first month or so of its existence, being inclined to resent its sex as a personal injury, and feeling aggrieved by his wife's devotion to the infant, which seemed to make her indifference to himself all the more obvious.

He left the house when Constance went out for her daily drive in the park, and strolled in the same direction, caring very little where he went upon this

particular afternoon. The Ladies' Mile was thronged with carriages, and there was a block at the Corner when Gilbert took his place listlessly among the loungers who were lolling over the rails. He nodded to the men he knew, and answered briefly enough to some friendly inquiries about his luck in Yorkshire.

'The filly ran well enough,' he said, 'but I doubt if she's got stay enough for the Chester.'

'Oh, of course you want to keep her dark, Sinclair. I heard she was a flyer, though.'

Mr. Sinclair did not pursue the conversation. The carriages moved on for a few paces, at the instigation of a mounted policeman, and then stopped again, leaving a perfectly appointed miniature brougham exactly in front of Gilbert Sinclair. The occupant of the brougham was Mrs. Walsingham. The stoppage brought her so close to Gilbert that it was impossible to avoid some kind of greeting. The widow's face paled as she recognised Gilbert, and then with a sudden impulse she held out her hand. It was the first time they had met since that unpleasant interview in Half-moon Street. The opportunity was very gratifying to Mrs. Walsingham.

She had most ardently desired to see how Gilbert supported his new position, to see for herself how far Mr. Wyatt's account of him might be credited. She put on the propitiatory manner of a woman who has forgiven all past wrongs.

'Why do you never come to see me?' she asked.

'I scarcely thought you would care to receive me, after what you said when we last met,' he replied, rather embarrassed by her easy way of treating the situation.

'Let that be forgotten. It is not fair to remember what a woman says when she is in a passion. I think you expressed a wish that we might be friends after your marriage, and I was too angry to accept that proof of your regard as I should have done. I have grown wiser with the passage of time; and, believe me, I am still your friend.'

There was a softness in her tone which flattered and touched Gilbert Sinclair. It contrasted so sharply with the cool contempt he had of late suffered at the hands of his wife. He remembered how this woman had loved him; and he asked himself what good he had gained by his marriage with

Constance Clanyarde; except the empty triumph of an alliance with a family of superior rank to his own, and the vain delight of marrying an acknowledged beauty.

Before Mrs. Walsingham's brougham had moved on he had promised to look in upon her that evening, and at ten o'clock he was seated in the familiar drawing-room, telling her his domestic wrongs, and freely confessing that his marriage had been a failure. Little by little she beguiled him into telling her these things, and played her part of adviser and consoler with exquisite tact, not once allowing him to perceive the pleasure his confession afforded her. He spoke of his child without the faintest expression of affection, and laughed bitterly as he described his wife's devotion to her infant.

'I thought as a woman of fashion she would have given herself very little trouble about the baby,' he said, 'but she contrives to find time for maternal raptures in spite of her fashionable friends. I have told her that she is killing herself, and the doctors tell her pretty much the same; but she will have her own way.'

'She would suffer frightfully if the child were to die,' said Mrs. Walsingham.

'Suffer! Yes, I was thinking of that this afternoon when she was engaged in her baby-worship. She would take my death coolly enough, I have no doubt, but I believe the loss of that child would kill her.'

Long after Gilbert Sinclair had left her that night Clara Walsingham sat brooding over all that he had told her upon the subject of his domestic life.

'And so he has found out what it is to have a wife who does not care for him,' she said to herself. 'He has gratified his fancy for a lovely face, and is paying a heavy price for his conquest. And I am to leave all my hopes of revenge to James Wyatt, and am to reward his services by marrying him? No, no, Mr. Wyatt! It was all very well to promise that in the day of my despair. I see my way to something better than that now. The loss of her child would kill her, would it? And her death would bring Gilbert back to me, I think. His loveless marriage has taught him the value of a woman's affection.'

CHAPTER IX.

THE BEGINNING OF SORROW.

Sir Cyprian did not again call at the house in Park Lane. He had heard of Constance Clanyarde's marriage during his African travels, and had come back to England resolved to avoid her as far as it was possible for him to do so. Time and absence had done little to lessen his love, but he resigned himself to her marriage with another as an inevitable fact, only regretting she had married a man of whom he had by no means an exalted opinion. James Wyatt was one of the first persons he visited on his arrival in London, and from him he heard a very unsatisfactory account of the marriage. It was this that had induced him to break through his resolution and call in Park Lane. He wanted to see for himself whether Constance was unhappy. He saw little, however, to enlighten him

on this point. He found the girl he had so fondly loved transformed into a perfect woman of the world; and he could draw no inference from her careless gaiety of manner, except that James Wyatt had said more than was justified by the circumstances of the case.

Instead of returning to Davenant for the autumn months, Mr. Sinclair chose this year to go to Germany; an extraordinary sacrifice of inclination one might suppose, as his chief delight was to be found at English race meetings, and in the supervision of his stable at Newmarket.

Mrs. Sinclair's doctor had recommended change of some kind as a cure for a certain lowness of tone, and general derangement of the nervous system under which his patient laboured. The medical man suggested Harrogate or Buxton—or some Welsh water-drinking place,—but when Gilbert proposed Schönesthal, in the Black Forest, he caught at the idea.

'Nothing could be better for Mrs. Sinclair and the baby,' he said, 'and you'll be near Baden-Baden if you want gaiety.'

'I don't care about brass bands and a lot of people,' answered Gilbert. 'I can shoot capercailzies. I shall get on well enough for a month or so.'

Constance had no objection to offer to this plan. She cared very little where her life was spent, so long as she had her child with her. A charming villa had been found, half hidden among pine trees, and here Mr. Sinclair established his wife, with a mixed household of English and foreign servants. She was very glad to be so completely withdrawn from the obligations of society, and to be able to devote herself almost entirely to the little girl, who was of course a paragon of infantine grace and intelligence in the eyes of mother and nurse. The nurse was a young woman belonging to the village near Marchbrook, one of the pupils of the Sunday school, whom Constance had known from girlhood. The nursemaid who shared her duties n London had not been brought to Schönesthal, but in her place Mrs. Sinclair engaged a French girl, with sharp dark eyes, and a very intelli-

gent manner. Martha Briggs, the nurse, was rather more renowned for honesty and good temper than for intellectual qualifications, and she seemed unusually slow and stolid in comparison with the vivacious French girl. This girl had come to Baden with a Parisian family, and had been dismissed with an excellent character upon the family's departure for Vienna with a reduced staff. Her name was Melanie Duport, and she contrived very rapidly to ingratiate herself with her mistress, as she had done with the good priest of the little church she had attended during her residence at Baden, who was delighted with her artless fervour and unvarying piety. Poor Martha Briggs was rather inclined to be jealous of this new rival in her mistress's favour, and derived considerable comfort from the fact that the baby did not take kindly to Melanie.

If the baby preferred her English nurse to Melanie, the little French girl, for her part, seemed passionately devoted to the baby. She was always eager to carry the child when the two nurses were

out together, and resented Martha's determination to deprive her of this pleasure. One day when the two were disputing together upon this subject, Martha bawling, at the French girl, under the popular delusion that she would make herself understood if she only talked loud enough, Melanie repeating her few words of broken English with many emphatic shrugs and frowns and nods, a lady who was strolling along the forest path, while her carriage waited for her at a little distance, stopped to listen to them, and to admire the baby. She spoke in French to Melanie, and did not address Martha at all, much to that young person's indignation. She asked Melanie to whom the child belonged, and how long she had been with it, and whether she was accustomed to nursing children, adding, with a smile, that she looked rather too ladylike for a nurse-maid.

Melanie was quite subdued by this compliment. She told the lady that this was the first time she had been nursemaid. She had been lady's-maid in her last situation, and had preferred the place very much to her present position. She told this strange lady

nothing about that rapturous affection for the baby which she was in the habit of expressing in Mrs. Sinclair's presence. She only told her how uncomfortable she had been made by the English nurse's jealousy.

'I am staying at the Hôtel du Roi,' said the lady, after talking to Melanie for some little time, 'and should like to see you if you can find time to call upon me some evening. I might be able to be of some use to you in finding a new situation when your present mistress leaves the neighbourhood.'

Melanie curtseyed, and replied that she would make a point of waiting upon the lady, and then the two nurses moved on with their little charge. Martha asked Melanie what the foreign lady had been saying, and the French girl replied carelessly that she had only been praising the baby.

'And well she may,' answered Miss Briggs, rather snappishly, 'for she's the sweetest child that ever lived; but for my own part I don't like foreigners, or any of their nasty deceitful ways.'

This rather invidious remark was lost upon Mademoiselle Duport, who only understood a few

words of English, and who cared very little for her fellow-servant's opinion upon any subject.

In spite of Gilbert Sinclair's protestation of indifference to the attractions of brass bands and crowded assemblies, he contrived to spend the greater part of his time at Baden, where the Goddess of Chance was still being worshipped in the brilliant Kursaal, while his wife was left to drink her fill of forest beauty, and that distant glory of inaccessible hills which the sun dyed rosy-red in the quiet eventide.

In these tranquil days, while her husband was waiting for the turn of Fortune's wheel in the golden *salon*, or yawning over "Galignani" in the reading-room, Constance's life came far nearer happiness than she had ever dared to hope it could come, after her perjury at God's altar two years ago. Many a time, while she was leading her butterfly life in the flower-garden of fashion, making dissipation stand for pleasure, she had told herself, in some gloomy hour of reaction, that no good ever could come of her marriage; that there was a curse upon

it, a righteous God's anathema against falsehood. And then her baby had come, and she had shed her first happy tears over the sweet small face, the blue eyes looking up at her full of vague wonder, and she had thanked Heaven for this new bliss, and believed her sin forgiven. After that time Gilbert had changed for the worse, and there had been many a polite passage-at-arms between husband and wife, and these encounters, however courteously performed, are apt to leave ugly scars.

But now, far away from all her frivolous acquaintance, free from the all-engrossing duties of a fine lady's existence, she put all evil thoughts out of her mind, Gilbert amongst them, and abandoned herself wholly to the delight of the pine forest and baby. She was very gracious to Gilbert, when he chose to spend an hour or two at home, or to drive with her in the pretty little pony-carriage in which she made most of her explorations, but she made no complaint about his long absences, she expressed no curiosity as to the manner in which he amused himself, or the company he kept at Baden-Baden; and though that centre of gaiety was only

four miles off, she never expressed a wish to share in its amusements.

Gilbert was not an agreeable companion at this time. That deep and suppressed resentment against his wife, like rancorous Iago's jealousy, did 'gnaw him inwards;' and although his old passionate love still remained, it was curiously interwoven with hatred.

Once when husband and wife were seated opposite each other in the September twilight after one of their rare *tête-à-tête* dinners, Constance looked up suddenly andcaught Gilbert's brooding eyes fixed upon her face with an expression which made her shiver.

'If you look at me like that, Gilbert,' she said, with a nervous laugh, 'I shall be afraid to drink this glass of Chambertin you've just poured out for me. There might be poison in it. I hope I have done nothing to deserve such an angry look. Othello must have looked something like that, I should think, when he asked Desdemona for the strawberry-spotted handkerchief.'

'Why did you marry me, Constance?' asked Sinclair, ignoring his wife's speech.

There was something almost piteous in this question, wrung from a man who loved honestly, according to his lights, and whose love was turned to rancour by the knowledge that it had won no return.

'What a question after two years of married life! Why did I marry you? Because you wished me to marry you, and because I believed you would make me a good husband, Gilbert, and because I had firmly resolved to make you a good wife.'

She said this earnestly, looking at him through her tears. Since her own life had become so much happier, since her baby's caresses had awakened all the dormant tenderness of her nature, she had felt more anxious to be on good terms with her husband. She would have taken much trouble—made some sacrifice of womanly pride—to win him back to that amiable state of mind she remembered in their honeymoon.

'I've promised to meet Wyatt at the Kursaal this evening,' said Sinclair, looking at his watch as he rose from the table, and without the slightest notice of his wife's reply.

'Is Mr. Wyatt at Baden?'

'Yes, he has come over for a little amusement at the tables—deuced lucky dog—always contrives to leave off a winner. One of those cool-headed fellows who know the turn of the tide. You've no objection to his being there, I suppose?'

'I wish you and he were not such fast friends, Gilbert. Mr. Wyatt is no favourite of mine.'

'Isn't he? Too much of the watch-dog about him, I suppose. As for fast friends, there's not much friendship between Wyatt and me. He's a useful fellow to have about one, that's all. He has served me faithfully, and has got well paid for his services. It's a matter of pounds, shillings, and pence on his side, and a matter of convenience on mine. No doubt Wyatt knows that as well as I do.'

'Don't you think friendship on such a basis may be rather an insecure bond?' said Constance, gravely, 'and that a man who can consent to profess friendship upon such degrading terms is likely to be half an enemy.'

'Oh, I don't go in for such high-flown ethics.

Jim Wyatt knows that it's his interest to serve me well, and that it's as much as his life is worth to play me false. Jim and I understand one another perfectly, Constance, you may be sure.'

'I am sure that he understands you,' answered Constance.

But Gilbert was gone before she had finished her sentence.

Baby, christened Christabel after the late Lady Clanyarde, was nearly a twelvemonth old, and had arrived, in the opinion of mother and nurse, at the most interesting epoch of babyhood. Her tender cooings, her joyous chucklings, her pretty cluck-clucking noises, as of anxious maternal hens calling their offspring, her inarticulate language of broken syllables, which only maternal love could interpret, made an inexhaustible fountain of delight. She was the blithest and happiest of babies, and every object in creation with which she became newly acquainted was a source of rapture to her. The flowers, the birds, the insect life of that balmy pine forest filled her with delight. The soft blue eyes sparkled with pleasure, the rosebud lips babbled

her wordless wonder, the little feet danced with ecstasy.

'Oh,' cried the delighted mother, 'if she could always be just like this, my plaything and my darling! Of course I shall love her just as dearly when she is older—a long-armed lanky girl, in a brown holland pinafore, always inking her fingers and getting into trouble about her lessons—like my sisters and me when we were in the schoolroom; but she can never be so pretty or so sweet again, can she, Martha?'

'Lor, 'mum, she'll always be a love,' replied the devoted nurse; 'and as for her arms being long and her fingers inky, you won't love her a bit less —and I'm sure I hope she won't be worried with too many lessons, for I do think great folks' children are to be pitied, half their time cooped up in school-rooms, or stretched out on back-boards, or strumming on the piano, while poor children are running wild in the fields.'

'Oh, Martha, how shocking!' cried Mrs. Sinclair, pretending to be horrified, 'to think that one of my favourite pupils should underrate the value of education!'

'Oh, no, indeed, ma'am, I have no such thought. I have often felt what a blessing it is to be able to read a good book and write a decent letter. But I never can think that life was meant to be all education.'

'Life is all education, Martha,' answered her mistress, with a sigh, 'but not the education of grammars and dictionaries. The World is our school, and Time our schoolmaster. No, Martha, my Christabel shall not be harassed with too much learning. We won't try to make her a paragon. Her life shall be all happiness and freedom, and she shall grow up without the knowledge of care or evil, except the sorrows of others, and those she shall heal; and she shall marry the man she loves, whether he is rich or poor, for I am sure my sweet one would never love a bad man.'

'I don't say that, ma'am,' remarked Martha, 'looks are so deceiving. I'm sure, there was my own cousin, on the father's side, Susan Tadgers, married the handsomest young man in Marchbrook village, and before they'd been two years married he took to drinking, and was so neglectful of him-

self, you wouldn't have known him; and now she's gone back to her friends, and his whiskers, that he used to take such a pride in, are rusty-brown and shaggy, like a stray Scotch terrier.'

Three days after that somewhat unpleasant *tête-à-tête* between husband and wife Gilbert Sinclair announced his intention of going back to England for the Leger.

'I never have missed a Leger,' he said, as if attendance at that race were a pious duty, like the Commination service on Ash Wednesday, 'and I shouldn't like to miss this race.'

'Hadn't we better go home at once then, Gilbert? I am quite ready to return.'

'Nonsense! I've taken this place till the 20th of October, and shall have to pay pretty stiffly for it. I shall come back directly after the Doncaster.'

'But it will be a fatiguing journey for you.'

'I'd just as soon be sitting in a railway train as anywhere else.'

'Does Mr. Wyatt go back with you?'

'No, Wyatt stays at Baden for the next week or so. He pretends to be here for the sake of

the waters, goes very little to the Kursaal, and lives quietly, like a careful old bachelor who wishes to mend a damaged constitution: but I should rather think he had some deeper game than water-drinking.'

Gilbert departed, and Constance was alone with her child. The weather was delightful, cloudless skies, balmy days: blissful weather for the grape-gatherers on the vine-clad slopes that sheltered one side of this quaint old village of Schönesthal. A river wound through the valley, a deep and rapid stream narrowing in this cleft of the hills, and utilized by some saw-mills in the outskirts of the village, whence at certain seasons rafts of timber were floated down the Rhine.

A romantic road following the course of this river was one of Mrs. Sinclair's favourite drives. There were picturesque old villages and mediæval ruins to be explored, and many lovely spots to be shown to baby, who, although inarticulate, was supposed to be appreciative.

Upon the first day of Gilbert's absence Martha Briggs came home from her afternoon promenade

looking flushed and tired, and complaining of sore throat. Constance was quick to take alarm. The poor girl was going to have a fever, perhaps, and must instantly be separated from baby. There was no medical man nearer than Baden, so Mrs. Sinclair sent the groom off at once to that town. She told him to inquire for the best English doctor in the place, or if there were no English practitioner at Baden, for the best German doctor. The moment she had given these directions, however, it struck her that the man, who was not remarkable for intelligence out of his stable, was likely to lose time in making his inquiries, and perhaps get misdirected at last.

'Mr. Wyatt is at Baden,' she thought. 'I dare say he would act kindly in such an extremity as this, though I have no opinion of his sincerity in a general way. Stop, Dawson,' she said to the groom, 'I'll give you a note for Mr. Wyatt, who is staying at the Badenscher Hof. He will direct you to the doctor. You'll drive to Baden in the pony carriage, and if possible bring the doctor back with you.

Baby was transferred to the care of Melanie Duport, who seemed full of sympathy and kindliness for her fellow-servant, a sympathy which Martha Briggs' surly British temper disdained. Mrs. Sinclair had Martha's bed moved from the nursery into her own dressing-room, where she would be able herself to take care of the invalid. Melanie was ordered to keep strictly to her nurseries, and on no account to enter Martha's room.

'But if Martha has a fever, and Madame nurses her, this little angel may catch the fever from Madame,' suggested Melanie.

'If Martha's illness is contagious I shall not nurse her,' answered Constance. 'I can get a nursing sister from one of the convents. But I like to have the poor girl near me, that, at the worst, she may know she is not deserted.'

'Ah, but Madame is too good! What happiness to serve so kind a mistress!'

Mr. Wyatt showed himself most benevolently anxious to be useful on receipt of Mrs. Sinclair's note. He made all necessary inquiries at the office of the hotel, and having found out the name of

the best doctor in Baden, took the trouble to accompany the groom to the medical man's house, and waited until Mr. Paulton, the English surgeon, was seated in the pony carriage.

'I shall be anxious to know if Mrs. Sinclair's nurse is seriously ill,' said Mr. Wyatt while the groom was taking his seat. 'I shall take the liberty to call at your surgery and inquire in the course of the evening.'

'Delighted to give you any information,' replied Mr. Paulton, graciously; 'I'll send you a line if you like. Where are you staying?'

'At the Badenscher.'

'You shall know how the young woman is directly I get back.'

'A thousand thanks.'

CHAPTER X.

THE CRUEL RIVER.

Mrs. Sinclair's precautions had been in no wise futile. Mr. Paulton pronounced that Martha's symptoms pointed only too plainly to scarlet fever. There could not be too much care taken to guard against contagion. The villa was airy and spacious, and Mrs. Sinclair's dressing-room at some distance from the nursery. There would be no necessity, therefore, Mr. Paulton said, for the removal of the child to another house. He would send a nursing sister from Baden—an experienced woman—to whose care the sick room might be safely confided.

The sister came—a middle-aged woman—in the sombre garb of her order, but with a pleasant, cheerful face, that well became her snow-white head-gear. She showed herself kind and dexterous in nursing the sick girl, but before she had been three days in the house Martha, who was now in a

raging fever, took a dislike to the nurse, and raved wildly about this black-robed figure at her bedside. In vain did the sister endeavour to reassure her. To the girl's wandering wits that foreign tongue seemed like the gibberish of some unholy goblin. She shrieked for help, and Mrs. Sinclair ran in from the adjoining room to see what was amiss. Martha was calmed and comforted immediately by the sight of her mistress; and from that time Constance devoted herself to the sick room, and shared the nurse's watch.

This meant separation from Christabel, and that was a hard trial for the mother who had never yet lived a day apart from her child; but Constance bore this bravely for the sake of the faithful girl—too thankful that her darling had escaped the fever which had so strangely stricken the nurse. The weather continued glorious, and baby seemed quite happy with Melanie, who roamed about with her charge all day, or went for long drives in the pony carriage under the care of the faithful Dawson, who was a pattern of sobriety and steadiness, and incapable of flirtation.

Mr. Wyatt rode over from Baden every other day to inquire about the nurse's progress—an inquiry which he might just as easily have made of the doctor in Baden,—and this exhibition of good feeling on his part induced Constance to think that she had been mistaken in her estimate of his character.

'The Gospel says "judge not,"' she thought, 'and yet we are always sitting in judgment upon one another. Perhaps, after all, Mr. Wyatt is as kind-hearted as his admirers think him, and I have done wrong in being prejudiced against him. He was Cyprian's friend, too, and always speaks of him with particular affection.'

Constance remembered that scene in the morning-room at Davenant. It was one of those unpleasant memories which do not grow fainter with the passage of years. She had been inclined to suspect James Wyatt of a malicious intention in his sudden announcement of Sir Cyprian's death—the wish to let her husband see how strong a hold her first love still had upon her heart. He, who had been Cyprian Davenant's friend and confidant, was likely to have

known something of that early attachment, or at least to have formed a shrewd guess at the truth.

'Perhaps I have suspected him wrongly in that affair,' Constance thought, now that she was disposed to think more kindly of Mr. Wyatt. 'His mention of Sir Cyprian might have been purely accidental.'

Four or five times in every day Melanie Duport brought the baby Christabel to the grass-plat under the window of Mrs. Sinclair's bedroom, and there were tender greetings between mother and child, baby struggling in nurse's grasp, and holding up her chubby arms as if she would fain have embraced her mother, even at that distance. These interviews were a sorry substitute for the long happy hours of closest companionship which mother and child had enjoyed at Schönesthal, but Constance bore the trial bravely. The patient was going on wonderfully well, Mr. Paulton said; the violence of the fever was considerably abated. It had proved a lighter attack than he had apprehended. In a week the patient would most likely be on the high road to recovery, and then Mrs. Sinclair could leave her entirely to the Sister's care, since poor Martha was

now restored to her right mind; and was quite reconciled to that trustworthy attendant.

'And then,' said Mr. Paulton, 'I shall send you to Baden for a few days, before you go back to baby, and you must put aside the clothes that you have worn in the sick room, and I think we shall escape all risk of infection.'

This was a good hearing. Constance languished for the happy hour when she should be able to clasp that rosy babbling child to her breast once more. Melanie Duport had been a marvel of goodness throughout this anxious time.

'I shall never forget how kind and thoughtful you have been, Melanie,' said Constance from her window, as the French girl stood in the garden below, holding baby up to be adored before setting out for her morning ramble.

'But it is a pleasure to serve Madame,' shrieked Melanie, in her shrill treble.

'Monsieur returns this evening,' said Constance, who had just received a hurried scrawl from Gilbert, naming the hour of his arrival, 'you must take care that Christabel looks her prettiest.'

'Ah, but she is always ravishingly pretty. If she were only a boy Monsieur would idolize her.'

'Where are you going this morning, Melanie?'

'To the ruined castle on the hill.'

'Do you think that is a safe place for baby?'

'What could there be safer? What peril can Madame foresee?'

'No,' said Constance, with a sigh. 'I suppose she is as safe there as anywhere else, but I am always uneasy when she is away from me.'

'But the love of Madame for this little one is a passion!'

Melanie departed with her charge, and Constance went back to the sick room to attend to her patient, while the Sister enjoyed a few hours' sleep.

One o'clock was Christabel's dinner-time, and Christabel's dinner was a business of no small importance in her mother's mind. One o'clock come, and there was no sign of Melanie and her charge, a curious thing; as Melanie was methodical and punctual to a praiseworthy degree, and was provided with a neat little silver watch to keep her acquainted with the time.

Two o'clock struck, and still no Melanie. Constance began to grow uneasy, and sent scouts to look for the nurse and child. But when three o'clock came and baby had not yet appeared, Constance became seriously alarmed, and put on her hat hastily, and went out to search for the missing nurse. She would not listen to the servants, who had just returned from their fruitless quest, and who begged her to let them go in fresh directions while she waited the result at home.

'No,' she said, 'I could not rest. I must go myself. Send to the police, any one, the proper authorities. Tell them my child is lost. Let them send in every direction. You have been to the ruins?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'And there was no one there? You could hear nothing?'

'No, ma'am,' answered Dawson the groom, 'the place was quite lonesome. There was nothing but grasshoppers chirruping.'

'The river!' thought Constance, white with horror. 'The ruins are only a little way from the river.'

She ran along the romantic pathway which followed the river bank for about half a mile, and then ascended the steep hill on the slope of which stood the battered old shell which had once been a feudal castle, with dungeons beneath its stately halls, and a deep and secret well for the safe putting away of troublesome enemies. Very peaceful looked the old ruins on this balmy September day, in the mellow afternoon sunshine, solitary, silent, deserted. There was no trace of nurse or child in the grassy court, or on the crumbling old rampart. Yes, just where the rampart looked down upon the river, just at that point where the short sunburnt grass sloped steepest, Constance Sinclair found a token of her child's presence, a toy dog, white, fleecy, and deliciously untrue to nature—an animal whose shapeless beauty and discordant yap had been the baby Christabel's delight.

Constance gave a little cry of joy.

'They have been here, they are somewhere near,' she thought, and then, suddenly, in the sweet summer stillness, the peril of this particular spot struck her—that steep descent—the sunburnt sward,

slippery as glass—the deep, swift current below; the utter loneliness of the scene—no help at hand.

'Oh, God!' she cried. 'The river, the river!'

She looked round her with wild beseeching eyes, as if she would have asked all nature to help her in this great agony. There was no one within sight. The nearest house was a cottage on the bank of the river, about a hundred yards from the bottom of the slope. A narrow footpath at the other end of the rampart led to the bank, and by this path Constance hurried down to make inquiries at the cottage.

The door was standing open, and there was a noise of several voices within. Some one was lying on a bed in a corner, and a group of peasant women were round her ejaculating compassionately, 'Das armes Mädchen. Ach, Himmel! Das ist schrecklich! Was gibt es?' and a good deal more of a spasmodic and sympathetic nature.

A woman's garments, dripping wet, were hanging in front of the stove, beside which sat an elderly vinedresser with stolid countenance, smoking his pipe.

Constance Sinclair put the women aside and

made her way to the bed. It was Melanie who lay there, wrapped in a blanket, sobbing hysterically.

'Melanie, where is my child?'

The girl shrieked and turned her face to the wall.

'She risked her life to save it,' said the man in German. 'The current is very rapid under the old Schloss. She plunged in after the baby. I found her in the water, clinging to the branch of a willow. If I had been a little later she would have been drowned.'

'And the child—my child?'

'Ach, mein Gott,' exclaimed the man, with a shrug, 'no one has seen the poor child. No one knows.'

'My child is drowned!'

'Liebe Frau,' said one of the women, 'the current is strong. The little one was at play on the rampart. Its foot slipped, and it rolled down the hill into the water. This good girl ran down after it, and jumped into the water. My husband found her there. She tried to save the child, she could do no more. But the current was too strong·

Dear lady, be comforted. The good God will help you.'

'No, God is cruel,' cried Constance, 'I will never serve Him or believe in Him any more.'

And with this blasphemy, wrung from her tortured heart by the intolerable agony of that moment, a great wave of blood seemed to rush over Constance Sinclair's brain, and she fell senseless on the stone floor.

CHAPTER XI.

GETTING OVER IT.

Baby Christabel was drowned. Of that fact there could be no shadow of doubt in the minds of those who had loved her, although the sullen stream which had swallowed her lovely form refused to give it back. Perchance the Lurleys had taken her for their playfellow, and transformed her mortal beauty into something rich and strange.

The search for the dead was continued longer than such searches generally are; but the nets which dragged the river bed did not bring up the gold hair, or the sad drowned eyes that had once danced with joyous life. And if anything could add to Constance Sinclair's grief it was this last drop of bitter, the knowledge that her child would never rest in hallowed ground, that there was no quiet grave on which she might lay her aching head and feel nearer her darling, no spot of earth to which she

could press her lips and fancy she could be heard by the little one lying in her pure shroud below, asleep on Mother Earth's calm breast.

No, her little one was driven by winds and waves, and had no resting-place under the weary stars.

Melanie Duport, when she recovered from the horror of that one dreadful day, told her story clearly enough. It was the same story she had told the peasant woman whose husband rescued her. Baby Christabel was playing on the rampart, Melanie holding her securely, as she believed, when the little one, attracted by the flight of a butterfly, made a sudden spring—alas! Madame knew how strong and active the dear angel was, and how difficult it was to hold her sometimes—and slipped out of Melanie's arms on to the rampart, and from the rampart—which was very low just there—as Madame might have observed—on to the grass, and rolled and rolled down to the river. It was all quick as thought,—one moment, and that angel's white frock was floating on the stream. Melanie tore down, she knew not how; it was as if Heaven had given her wings in that moment. The white frock was

still floating. Melanie plunged into the river! Ah, but what was her life at such a time? a nothing! Alas, she tried to grasp the frock, but the stream swept it from her; an instant, and one saw it no more. She felt herself sinking, and then her senses left her. She knew nothing till she woke in the cottage where Madame found her.

Melanie was a heroine in a small way after this sad event. The villagers thought her a wonderful young person. Her master rewarded her handsomely, and promised to retain her in his household till she should choose to marry. Her mistress was as grateful as despair can be for any benefit.

The light of Constance Sinclair's life had gone. Her one source of joy was turned to a fountain of bitterness. A dull and blank despair took possession of her. She did not succumb utterly to her grief. She struggled against it bravely, and she would accept no one's compassion or sympathy. One of her married sisters, a comfortable matron, with half a dozen healthy children in her nursery, offered to come and stay with Mrs. Sinclair, but this kindly offer was refused almost uncivilly.

'What good could you do me?' asked Constance. 'If you spoke to me of my darling I should hate you, yet I should always be thinking of her. Do you suppose you could comfort me by telling me about your herd of children, or by repeating little bits of Scripture, such as people quote in letters of condolence? No, there is no such thing as comfort for *my* grief. I like to sit alone and think of my pet, and be wretched in my own way. Don't be angry with me, dear, for writing so savagely. I sometimes feel as if I hated every one in the world, but happy mothers most of all.'

Gilbert Sinclair endured the loss of his little girl with a certain amount of philosophy. In the first place she was not a boy, and had offended him *ab initio* by that demerit. She had been a pretty little darling, no doubt, and he had had his moments of fondness for her; but his wife's idolatry of the child was an offence that had rankled deep. He had been jealous of his infant daughter. He put on mourning, and expressed himself deeply afflicted, but his burden did not press heavily. A

boy would come, perhaps, by and by, and make amends for this present loss, and Constance would begin her baby-worship again.

Mr. Sinclair did not know that for some hearts there is no such thing as beginning again.

Martha Briggs recovered health and strength, but her grief for the lost baby was very genuine and unmistakable. Constance offered to keep her in her service, but this favour Martha declined with tears.

'No, ma'am, its best for both that we should part. I should remind you of——' (here a burst of sobs supplied the missing name), 'and you'd remind me. I'll go home. I'm more grateful than words can say for all your goodness; but oh! I hate myself so for being ill, and leaving my precious one to anybody else's care. I never, never shall forgive myself—never!'

So Martha went back to Davenant in her mistress's train, and there parted with her to return to the paternal roof, which was not very far off. It was not so with Melanie. She only clung to her mistress more devotedly after the loss of the baby.

If her dear lady would but let her remain with her as her own maid, she would be beyond measure happy. Was not hair-dressing the art in which she most delighted, and millinery the natural bent of her mind? Gilbert said the girl had acted nobly, and ought to be retained in his wife's service; so Constance, whose Abigail had lately left her to better herself by marriage with an aspiring butler, consented to keep Melanie as her personal attendant. She did this, believing with Gilbert that the girl deserved recompence; but Melanie's presence was full of painful associations, and kept the bitter memory of her lost child, continually before her.

Constance went back to Davenant, and life flowed on in its slow and sullen course, somehow, without Baby Christabel. The two rooms that had been nurseries—two of the prettiest rooms in the big old house, one of them having French windows and a wide balcony, with a flight of steps leading down to a quaint old Dutch garden, shut in from the rest of the grounds by a holly hedge, now became temples dedicated to the lost. In these rooms Con-

stance spent all the time she could call her own. But the business of life still went on, and there was a great deal of time she could not call her own. Gilbert, having dismissed the memory of his lost child to the limbo of unpleasant recollections, resented his wife's brooding grief as a personal injury, and was determined to give that sullen sorrow no indulgence. When the hunting season was at its best, and pheasant-shooting made one of the attractions of Davenant, Mr. Sinclair determined to fill his house with his own particular set—horsey men—men who gave their minds to guns and dogs, and rarely opened their mouths for speech except to relate some anecdote about an accomplished setter, or 'that liver-coloured pointer of mine, you know;' or to dilate upon the noble behaviour of 'that central fire Lancaster of mine,' in yesterday's battue; men who devoted their nights to billiards, and whose conversation was of breaks and flukes, pockets and cannons.

'You'd better ask some women, Constance,' said Gilbert, one Sunday morning in November, as they sat at their *tête-à-tête* breakfast, the wife reading her budget of letters, the husband with the *Field*

propped up in front of his coffee cup, and the *Sporting Gazette* at his elbow. 'I've got a lot of men coming next week, and you might feel yourself *de trop* in a masculine party.'

'Have you asked people, Gilbert? So soon!' said Constance, reproachfully.

'I don't know what you call soon. The pheasants are as wild as they can be, and Lord Highover's hounds have been out nearly a month. You'd better ask some nice young women; the right sort, you know, no nonsense about them.'

'I thought we should have spent this winter quietly, Gilbert,' said Constance, in a low voice, looking down at her black dress with its deep folds of crape, 'just this one winter.'

'That's sheer sentimentality,' exclaimed Gilbert, giving the *Field* an impatient twist as he folded it to get at his favourite column. 'What good would it do you or me to shut ourselves up in this dismal old house like a pair of superannuated owls? Would it bring back the poor little thing we've lost, or make her happier in paradise? No, Constance. She's happy. "Nothing can touch her more," as

Milton or somebody says. Egad, I think the poor little darling is to be envied for having escaped all the troubles and worries of life; for life at best is a bad book, you can't hedge everything. Don't cry, Constance. That long face of yours is enough to send a fellow into an untimely grave. Let us get a lot of pleasant people round us, and make the most of this place while it's ours. We mayn't have it always.'

This sinister remark fell upon an unheeding ear. Constance Sinclair's thoughts had wandered far away from that oak-panelled breakfast-room. They had gone back to the sunny hill-side, the grassy rampart, the swift and fatal river, the bright landscape which had stamped itself upon her memory, indelibly, in the one agonized moment in which she had divined her darling's fate.

'Gilbert, I really am not fit to receive people,' she said after a silence of some minutes, during which Mr. Sinclair had amused himself by sundry adventurous dips of his fork, like an old Jewish priest's dive into the sacred seething-pot, into the crockery case of a Perigord pie. 'If you have set

your heart upon having your friends this winter you had better let me go away, to Hastings or somewhere. It would be pleasanter for you to be free from the sight of my unhappiness.'

'Yes, and for you to find consolation elsewhere, no doubt. You would pretty soon find a consoler if I gave you your liberty.'

'Gilbert!'

'Oh, don't think to frighten me with your indignant looks. I have not forgotten the scene in this room when you heard of your old lover's supposed death. Sir Cyprian Davenant is in London, in high feather too, I understand; for some ancient relation of his has been obliging enough to die and leave him another fortune. A pity you didn't wait a little longer, isn't it? A pity your father should have been in such a hurry to make his last matrimonial bargain.'

'Gilbert,' cried Constance, passionately, 'what have I ever done that you should dare to talk to me like this? How have I ever failed in my duty to you?'

'Shall I tell you? I won't say that, having

accepted me for your husband, you ought to have loved me. That would be asking too much. The ethics of the nineteenth century don't soar so high as that. But you might have pretended to care for me just a little. It would have been only civil, and it would have made the wheels of life go smoother for both of us.'

'I am not capable of pretending, Gilbert,' answered Constance, gravely. 'If you would only be a little more considerate, and give me credit for being what I am, your true and dutiful wife, I might give you as much affection as the most exacting husband could desire. I would, Gilbert,' she cried, in a voice choked by sobs, 'for the sake of our dead child.'

'Don't humbug,' said Gilbert, sulkily. 'We ought to understand each other by this time. As for running away from this house, or any other house of mine, to mope in solitude, or to find consolation among old friends, please comprehend that if you leave my house once you leave it for ever. I shall expect to see you at the head of my table. I shall expect you to surround yourself with pretty women.

I shall expect you to be a wife that a fellow may be proud of. Didn't I marry you to be a credit and an honour to me? I might have married as handsome a woman as you—one who understood me, and worshipped the ground I walked upon. But I wanted a wife whom all the world would admire.'

'I shall do my best to oblige you, Gilbert; but perhaps I might have been a better wife if you had let me take life my own way.'

From that time Constance Sinclair put aside all outward token of her grief. She wrote to the gayest and most pleasure-loving of her acquaintance—young married women, whose chief delight was to dress more expensively than their dearest friends, and to be seen at three parties on the same evening, and a few who were still spinsters, from no fault or foolishness of their own, since they had neglected neither pains nor art in the endeavour to secure an eligible partner for the dance of life. To these Constance wrote her letters of invitation, and the first sentence in each letter was sufficient to ensure an acceptance.

'Dearest Ida,

'My husband is filling the house with men for the hunting season. Do come and save me from being bored to death by their sporting talk. Be sure you bring your hunting habit. Gilbert can give you a good mount,' &c., &c.

Whereupon dearest Ida, twisting about the little note, meditatively remarked to her last bosom friend and confidante, 'Odd that they should ask people so soon after the death of Mrs. Sinclair's baby,—drowned, too,—it was in all the papers. Davenant is a sweet house to stay at, quite liberty hall. Yes, I think I shall go, and if there are plenty of people I can finish out my ball dresses in the evenings.'

Before another Sunday came Davenant was full of people, the attics noisy with strange lady's-maids, the stables and harness-rooms full of life and bustle, not an empty stall or an unoccupied loose box in the long range of buildings, the billiard room and smoking room resonant with masculine laughter, unknown dogs pervading the out-buildings, and chained up in every available corner.

Constance Sinclair had put away her sombre

robes of crape and cashmere, and met her friends with welcoming smiles, radiant in black silk and lace, her graceful figure set off by the latest Parisian fashion, which being the newest was of course considered infinitely the best.

'I thought she would have been in deeper mourning,' said one of Mrs. Sinclair's dearest friends to another during a confidential chat in a dusky corner at afternoon tea.

'The men were so noisy with their haw-haw talk, one could say what one liked,' remarked Mrs. Millamount afterwards to Lady Loveall.

'Looks rather heartless, doesn't it?—an only child, too. She might at least wear paramatta instead of that black silk,—not even a mourning silk. I suppose that black net trimmed with jet she wore last night was from Worth. He is so fond of smothering things with jet. It's one of his few weaknesses.'

'My dear, you couldn't have looked at it properly. Worth wouldn't have made her such a thing if she had gone down on her knees to him. The sleeve was positively antediluvian. Nice

house, isn't it?—everything good style. What matches all these Clanyardes have made!'

'Is it true that she was engaged to Sir Cyprian Davenant?'

'They say so. How sorry she must be! He has just come into quite a heap of money. Some old man down in the Lincolnshire fens left it him, quite a character, I believe. Never spent anything except on black-letter books, and those have been sold for a fortune at Sotheby's. Ah, Mr. Wyatt, how d'ye do?' as the solicitor, newly arrived that afternoon, threaded his way towards the quiet corner, 'do come and sit here. You always know everything. Is it true that Sir Cyprian Davenant has come into a fortune?'

'Nothing can be more true, unless it is that Mrs. Millamount looks younger and lovelier every season.'

'You horrid flatterer! You are worse than a French milliner. And is it true that Mrs. Sinclair and Sir Cyprian were engaged? But no, it would be hardly fair to ask you about that. You are a friend of the family.'

'As a friend of the family I am bound to inform

you that rumour is false on that point. There was no engagement.'

'Really, now?'

'But Sir Cyprian was madly in love with Miss Clanyarde!'

'And she——'

'I was not in the lady's confidence; but I believe that it was only my friend's poverty which prevented their marriage.'

'How horribly mercenary!' cried Mrs. Millamount, who came of an ancient Irish family, proud as Lucifer and poor as Lazarus, and who had been sacrificed in the blossom of her days—like Iphigenea, to raise the wind—not to Diana, but to a rich stockbroker. Perhaps, as the event had occurred a long time ago, she may have forgotten how much more Plutus had had to do with her marriage than Cupid.

CHAPTER XII.

'THE SHACKLES OF AN OLD LOVE STRAITEN'D HIM.'

CYPRIAN DAVENANT had inherited a fortune. Common rumour had not greatly exaggerated the amount of his wealth, though there was the usual disposition to expatiate upon the truth. Needy men looked at him with envy as he went in and out of his club, or sat in a quiet corner composedly reading the last Quarterly, or Edinburgh, and almost wondered that he was so well able to contain his spirits, and was not tempted to perform a savage dance of the Choctaw character, or to give expression to his rapture in a war-whoop.

'Hang it all, you know,' remarked an impecunious younger son, 'it aggravates a fellow to see Davenant take things so quietly. He doesn't even look cheerful. He doesn't invite the confidence of his necessitous friends. Such a knight of the rueful countenance would hardly stand a pony. And he won't play

whist, or touch a billiard cue,—quite an unapproachable beast.'

A man cannot be lucky in all things. Sir Cyprian had set his life upon a cast, and the fortune of the game had been against him. The inheritance of this unexpected wealth seemed to him almost a purposeless and trivial stroke of fate. What could it avail him now? It could not give him Constance Clanyarde, or even restore the good old house in which his father and mother had lived and died. Time had set a gulf between him and happiness; and the fortune that came too late seemed rather the stroke of some mocking and ironical Fate than the gift of a benevolent destiny. He came back from Africa like a man who lives a charmed life, escaping all manner of perils, from the gripe of marsh fever to the jaws of crocodiles; while men who had valued existence a great deal more than he had done had succumbed and left their bones to bleach upon the sands of the Gold Coast, or to rot in a stagnant swamp. Cyprian Davenant had returned to find the girl he loved the wife of the man he most disliked. He heard of her marriage more in sorrow than in anger. He had not

expected to find her free. His knowledge of Lord Clanyarde's character had assured him that his lordship's beautiful daughter would be made to marry well. No fair Circassian, reared by admiring and expectant relatives in the seclusion of her Caucasian home, fattened upon milk and almonds to the standard of Oriental beauty, and in due course to be carried to the slave market, had ever been brought up with a more specific intention than that which had ruled Lord Clanyarde in the education of his daughters. They had all done well. He spent very little time at Marchbrook now-a-days, but dawdled away life agreeably, at his daughters' country houses out of the season, at his clubs in the season, and felt that his mission had been accomplished. No father had ever done more for his children, and they had cost him very little.

'What a comfort to have been blest with lovely marriageable daughters, instead of lubberly sons, squatting on a father's shoulders like the old man of the mountain,' thought Lord Clanyarde, when he had leisure to reflect upon his lot.

After that one visit in Park Lane, Sir Cyprian

Davenant had studiously avoided Mrs. Sinclair. He had very little inclination for society, and, although his friends were ready to make a fashionable lion of him upon the strength of his African explorations, he had strength of mind enough to refuse all manner of flattering invitations, and innumerable introductions to people who were dying to know him.

He took a set of chambers in one of the streets between the Strand and the river, surrounded himself with the books he loved, and set about writing the history of his travels. He had no desire to achieve fame by bookmaking, but a man must do something with his life. Sir Cyprian felt himself too old or too unambitious to enter one of the learned professions; and he felt himself without motive for sustained industry. He had an income that sufficed for all his desires. He would write his book, tell the world the wonders he had seen, and then go back to Africa and see more wonders, and perhaps leave his bones along the road, as some of his fellow-travellers had done.

He heard of Constance Sinclair—heard of her as one of the lights in fashion's sidereal system—

holding her own against all competitors. He saw her once or twice, between five and six on a June afternoon, when the carriages were creeping slowly along the Ladies' Mile, and the high-mettled horses champing their bits and tugging at their bearing-reins in that elegant martyrdom by which fashion contrives to make the life of a three hundred guinea pair of carriage horses a good deal worse than that of a costmonger's donkey. He saw her looking her loveliest, and concluded that she was happy. She had all things that were reckoned good in her world. Why should he suppose there was anything wanting to her content?

The lawyer's letter which told him of old Colonel Gryffin's death, and the will which bequeathed to him the bulk of the old man's fortune, found Sir Cyprian in his quiet chambers near the river, smoking the cigar of peace over the last new treatise on metaphysics, by a German philosopher. Lady Davenant had been a Miss Gryffin, and the favourite niece of this ancient Anglo-Indian, Colonel Gryffin, who had lived and died a bachelor. Sir Cyprian had a faint recollection of seeing a testy

old gentleman, with a yellow complexion, at Davenant Park, in his nursery days, and having been told to call the old gentleman 'uncle,' whereupon he had revolted openly, and had declined to confer that honour upon such a wizened and tawny-complexioned atomy as the little old gentleman in question.

'My uncles are big,' he said. 'You're too little for an uncle.'

Soon afterwards the queer old figure had melted out of the home picture. Colonel Gryffin had gone back to the Lincolnshire fens, and his ancient missals and incunabula, and had lived so remote an existence that the chief feeling caused by his death was astonishment at the discovery that he had been so long alive.

Messrs. Dott and Gowunn, a respectable firm of family solicitors in Lincoln's Inn, begged to inform Sir Cyprian Davenant that his great-uncle on the maternal side, Colonel Gryffin, of Hobart Hall, near Hammerfield, Lincolnshire, had appointed him residuary legatee and sole executor to his will. Sir Cyprian was quite unmoved by the announce-

ment. Residuary legatee might mean a great deal, or it might mean very little. He had a misty recollection of being told that Colonel Gryffin was rich, and was supposed to squander untold sums upon Gutenberg Bibles, and other amiable eccentricities of a bookish man. He had never been taught to expect any inheritance from this ancient bachelor, and he had supposed him for many years laid at rest under the daisies of his parish churchyard.

The residuary legateeship turned out to mean a very handsome fortune. The Colonel had not spent a third of his income—despite his mania for rare editions—and his money had been accumulating for the last thirty years. The missals and Bibles, and antique Books of Hours, the Decameron, and the fine old Shakespeare, were put up to auction —by desire of the testator—and were sold for twice and three times the sums the old Colonel had paid for them. In a word, Sir Cyprian Davenant, who had esteemed himself passing rich upon four hundred a year, stood possessed of a hundred and twenty thousand pounds.

It came too late to buy him the desire of his

heart, and, not being able to win for him this one blessing, it seemed almost useless.

James Wyatt was one of the first to congratulate Sir Cyprian upon this change of fortune.

'A pity the old gentleman did not die before you went to Africa,' he said, sympathetically. 'It would have squared things for you and Miss Clanyarde.'

'Miss Clanyarde made a very good marriage,' answered Cyprian, too proud to bare his old wound even to friendly James Wyatt. 'She is happy.'

Mr. Wyatt shrugged his shoulders dubiously.

'Who knows?' he said. 'We see our friends' lives from the outside, and, like a show at a fair, the outside is always the best part of the performance.'

This happened while Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair were at Schönesthal. Soon came the tidings of Baby Christabel's fate, briefly told in a newspaper paragraph, and Cyprian Davenant's heart bled for the woman he had once loved. He was not a little surprised when James Wyatt called upon him one day in November and told him he was going

down to Davenant, where there was to be a house full of company.

'So soon after the little girl's death!' exclaimed Sir Cyprian.

'Yes, it is rather soon, no doubt. But they would be moped to death at Davenant without people. Sackcloth and ashes are quite out of fashion, you see. People don't go in for intense mourning now-a-days.'

'People have hearts, I suppose, even in the nineteenth century?' said Sir Cyprian, somewhat bitterly. 'I should have thought Mrs. Sinclair would have felt the loss of her little girl very deeply.'

'We don't know what *she* may feel,' returned Wyatt. 'Gilbert likes his own way.'

'You don't mean to say that he ill-uses his wife?' asked Sir Cyprian, alarmed.

'Ill-usage is a big word. We don't employ it now-a-days,' replied Mr. Wyatt, with his imperturbable smile. 'Gilbert Sinclair is my client, and an excellent one, as you know. It would ill become me to disparage him; but I must admit that he and Mrs. Sinclair

are not the happiest couple whose domestic hearth I have ever sat by. She had some secret grief, even before the death of her child, and made up for being very brilliant in society by being exceedingly dull at home. I don't expect to find her very lively now that she has lost the only being she really cared for. She absolutely worshipped that child.'

This conversation gave Sir Cyprian Davenant material for much sad thought. To know that Constance was unhappy seemed to bring her nearer to him. It brought back the thought of the old days when those innocent eyes had looked into his, eloquent with unconscious love, when Constance Clanyarde had given him her heart without thought for to-morrow, happy in the knowledge that she was loved, believing her lover strong to conquer Fate and Fortune. And he had brought the chilly light of worldly wisdom to bear on this dream of Arcady. He had been strong, self-denying, and had renounced his own happiness in the hope of securing hers. And now Fate laughed him to scorn with this gift of vain riches; and he found that his worldly wisdom had been supreme folly.

'What a self-sufficient fool, what an idiot I have been!' he said to himself in an agony of remorse. 'And now what atonement can I make to her for my folly? Can I defend her from the purse-proud snob she has been sold to? can I save her wounded heart one pang? can I be near her in her hour of misery, or offer one drop of comfort from a soul overflowing with tenderness and pity? No, to approach her is to do her a wrong. But I can watch at a distance, perhaps. I may use other eyes. My money may be of some use in buying her faithful service from others. God bless her! I consecrate my days to her service: distant or near, I will be her friend and her defender!'

Two days later Sir Cyprian met Lord Clanyarde at that nobleman's favourite club. It was a club which Cyprian Davenant rarely used, although he had been a member ever since his majority, and it may be that he went out of his beaten track in the hope of encountering Constance Sinclair's father.

Lord Clanyarde was very cordial and complimentary upon his friend's altered fortunes.

'You must feel sorry for having parted with

Davenant,' he said, 'when you might so easily have kept it.'

'Davenant is rather too big for a confirmed bachelor.'

'True. It would have been a white elephant, I dare say. Sinclair has improved the place considerably. You ought to come down and have a look at it. I'm going to Marchbrook to shoot next week. Come and stay with me,' added Lord Clanyarde with heartiness, not at all prepared to be taken at his word.

'I shall be charmed,' said Sir Cyprian, to his lordship's infinite astonishment.

People generally took his invitations for what they were worth, and declined them. But here was a man fresh from the centre of Africa, who hardly understood the language of polite society.

CHAPTER XIII.

'AT MERLIN'S FEET THE WILY VIVIEN LAY.'

All went merrily at Davenant during the brief bleak days of November and December, though the master of the house was not without his burden of secret cark and care. That magnificent iron and coal producing estate in the north had not been yielding quite so much hard cash lately as its owner expected from it. Strikes and trade-unionism had told upon Mr. Sinclair's income. The coal market had fluctuated awkwardly. Belgium had been tapping the demand for iron. There was plenty of money coming in, of course, from Gilbert's large possessions; but unfortunately there was also a great deal going out. The Newmarket stables had cost a small fortune; the Newmarket horses had been unlucky; and Gilbert's book for the last three or four seasons had been a decided failure.

'The fact is, Wyatt,' he remarked to that con-

fidential adviser one dull afternoon over a *tête-à-tête* game at billiards, 'I'm spending too much money.'

'Have you only just found that out?' asked the solicitor, with a calm sneer.

'The purchase of this confounded place took too much of my capital, and these strikes and lock-outs coming on the top of it——'

'Not to mention your vicious habit of plunging,' remarked Mr. Wyatt, parenthetically, taking a careful aim at the distant red.

'Have very nearly stumped me.'

'Why not sell Davenant? You don't want such a big barrack of a place, and—Mrs. Sinclair isn't happy here.'

'No,' said Gilbert, with a smothered oath, 'the associations are too tender.'

'I could get you a purchaser to-morrow.'

'Yes, at a dead loss, no doubt. You fellows live by buying and selling, and you don't care how much your client loses by a transaction that brings grist to your mill.'

'I can get you the money you gave for Davenant, timber and all.'

'Who's your purchaser?'

'I'd rather not mention his name yet awhile. He is a quiet party, and wouldn't like to be talked about.'

'I understand. Some city cad, who has made his money in the zoological line.'

'How zoological?'

'Bulling and bearing. Well, if those beastly colliers hold out much longer, he may have Davenant and welcome. But he must take my new furniture at a valuation. I've paid no end of money for it.'

'What did you do with the Jacobean oak?'

'Oh, the old sticks are put away somewhere, I believe, in lofts and lumber-rooms, and servants' bedrooms.'

Some of Mr. Sinclair's other guests dropped into the billiard-room at this juncture, and there was no more said about the sale of Davenant.

Nobody—not even his worst enemy, and no doubt among his numerous friends he had several foes—could deny Mr. Wyatt's merits as a guest in a country house. He was just the kind of man to keep things going—a past master in all social accomplishments,—and Gilbert Sinclair graciously allowed him

to take the burden of amusing everybody upon his shoulders, while the master of the house went his own way, and hunted or shot at his own pleasure. Mr. Sinclair liked to fill his house with people, but he had no idea of sacrificing his own inclination to their entertainment; he thought he did quite enough for them in giving them what he elegantly called 'the run of their teeth,' and the free use of his second-rate hunters.

On Mr. Wyatt, therefore, devolved the duty of keeping things going—devising the day's amusements, protecting the ladies of the party from the selfishness of neglectful and unappreciative mankind, arranging picnic luncheons in keepers' lodges, at which the fair sex might assist—finding safe mounts for those aspiring damsels who wanted to ride to hounds—planning private theatricals, and stimulating the musical members of the society to the performance of part-songs in a business-like and creditable manner.

He had done all these things last winter, and the winter before, but on those occasions he had been aided in his task. Constance Sinclair had given him

her hearty co-operation. She had played her part of hostess with grace and spirit—had allowed no cloud of thought or memory to obscure the brightness of the present moment. She had given herself up, heart and soul, to the duties of her position, and her friends had believed her to be the happiest of women, as well as the most fortunate. To seem thus had cost her many an effort; but she had deemed this one of her obligations as Gilbert Sinclair's wife.

Now all was changed. Her husband had been obeyed, but that obedience was all which Constance Sinclair's sense of duty could now compel. She sat like a beautiful statue at the head of her husband's table, she moved about among her guests with as little part in their pleasures and amusements as if she had been a picture on the wall—courteous to all, but familiar with none. She seemed to live apart from her surroundings—a strange and silent life, whose veil of shadow even sympathy failed to penetrate. Mrs. Millamount, not unfriendly, despite her frivolity, had tried to get Constance to talk of her bereavement, but the wounded heart was galled by the gentlest touch.

'It's very kind of you,' she said, divining her friend's motive, 'but I'd rather not talk of her. Nothing can ever lessen my grief, and I like best to keep it quite to myself.'

'How you must hate us all for being here!' said Mrs. Millamount, moved with compunction at the incongruity between that house full of company and the mother's desolate heart. 'It seems quite abominable for us to be thinking of nothing but pleasure while you bear your burden alone.'

'Nobody could divide it with me, or make it lighter for me,' answered Constance, gently. 'Pray do not trouble yourself about my sorrows. If I could hide them better I would. Gilbert likes to be surrounded with pleasant faces, and I am very glad that he should be pleased.'

'She's quite too good to live,' remarked the sprightly Mrs. Millamount to her friend Lady Loveall that evening. 'But do you know I'm afraid there's something a little wrong here,' and Flora Millamount touched her ivory forehead suggestively with the tip of her Watteau fan.

James Wyatt was not a sportsman. He was an

excellent judge of a horse, rode well, and knew as much about guns as the men who were continually handling them, but he neither shot nor hunted, and he had never been known to speculate upon the turf. These things were for his clients—a very pretty way of running through handsome fortunes and bringing their owner to the Jews—not for him. He could take his amusement out of other men's follies and remain wise himself. Life to him was an agreeable and instructive spectacle, which he assisted at as comfortably as he heard 'Don Giovanni' from his stall in the middle of the third row; and when the foul fiend of insolvency whisked off one of his dearest friends to the infernal regions where bankrupts and outlaws inhabit, he felt what a nice thing it was to be only a spectator of the great drama.

Not being a sportsman, Mr. Wyatt had a good deal of time to himself at Davenant despite his general usefulness. There were rainy mornings when the men were out shooting, and the 'bus had not yet started for the point of rendezvous with the ladies and the luncheon. These leisure hours Mr. Wyatt improved by strolling about the corridors,

looking at the old pictures—for the most part in that meditative mood in which a man sees very little of the picture he seems to contemplate—and occasionally varying his meditations by a quiet flirtation with Melanie Duport. That young person had plenty of leisure for perambulating the corridors between breakfast and dinner. Mrs. Sinclair was by no means an exacting mistress, and Melanie's life at Davenant was one of comparative idleness. Her superiority of mind showed itself in a calm contempt for her fellow-servants, and she was rarely to be found in the servants' rooms. She preferred the retirement of her own bedchamber, and a French novel lent her by that good-natured Mr. Wyatt, who had always a supply of the newest and worst Parisian literature in his portmanteau. On this dull December morning—a day of gray clouds and frequent showers—Mr. Wyatt stood before a doubtful Vandyke, smoking meditatively, and apparently absorbed in a critical examination of Prince Rupert's slouched beaver and ostrich plume, when Melanie's light quick step at the other end of the gallery caught his ear.

He turned slowly round to meet her, puffing lazily at his cigar.

'Eh, la belle,' he exclaimed, 'even an English December does not dim the lustre of those Southern eyes.'

'I was born in the *Quartier Latin*, and my parents were all that there is of the most Parisian,' answered Melanie, scornfully.

'Then you must have stolen those eyes of yours from one of the Murillos in the Louvre. What news, little one?'

'Only that I find myself more and more weary of this dismal old barrack.'

'Come, now, Melanie, you must confess you have a good time of it here.'

'Oh, as for that, perhaps I ought not to complain. My mistress is very gentle, too gentle; it gnaws me to the heart to see her silent grief. That preys upon my mind.'

Here Melanie squeezed out a tear, which she removed from her pearl-powdered cheek—a very sallow cheek under the powder—daintily, with the corner of a hem-stitched handkerchief.

'You are too compassionate, little one,' said Mr. Wyatt, putting his arm round her waist consolingly. Perhaps he had gone a little too far with these leisure half-hours of flirtation. He had an idea that the girl was going to be troublesome. Tears augured mischief.

'*C'est dommage*,' murmured Melanie, 'I have the heart too tender.'

'Don't fret, my angel. See here, pretty one, I have brought you another novel,' taking a paper-covered book from his pocket.

'Belot?'

'No, Zola.'

'I don't want it. I won't read it. Your novels are full of lies. They describe men who will make any sacrifice for the woman they love—men who will take a peasant girl from her hovel, or a grisette from her garret, and make her a queen. There are no such men. I don't believe in them,' cried the girl, passionately, her eyes flashing fire.

'Don't be angry, Melanie. Novels would be dull if they told only the truth.'

'They would be very amusing if they described men of your pattern,' retorted Melanie. 'Men who

say sweet things without meaning them—who flatter every woman they talk to, who turn a foolish girl's head with their pretty speeches and caressing ways, and then laugh at her folly. Yes, as you are laughing at me,' cried Melanie, exasperated by Mr. Wyatt's placid smile.

'No, my sweet, I am only admiring you,' he replied, calmly. 'What have I done to raise this tempest?'

'What have you done?' cried Melanie, and then burst into tears, real tears this time, which seriously damaged the pearl powder. 'I am sure I don't know why I should care so much for you. You are not handsome. You are not even young.'

'Perhaps not, but I am very agreeable,' said James Wyatt, complacently. 'Don't cry, *ma belle*, only be patient and reasonable, and perhaps I shall be able to prove to you some day that there are men, real living men, who are capable of any sacrifice for the woman they love.'

Melanie allowed herself to be appeased by this rather vague speech, but she was only half convinced.

'Tell me only one thing,' she said. 'Who is that lady I saw at Schönesthal? and why were you so anxious to please her?'

James Wyatt's smooth face clouded at this question.

"She is related to me, and I knew she had been badly used. Hush, my dear! walls have ears. There are things we mustn't talk about here.'

'What is the lady's real name?'

'Madame Chose. She comes of the oldest branch of the family, altogether *grande dame*, I assure you.'

'I wish she would take me into her service.'

'Why, you are better off here than with her.'

'I don't think so. I should see more of you if I lived with that lady.'

'There you are wrong. I see Madame Chose very rarely.'

'I don't believe you.'

'Melanie, that's extremely rude.'

'I believe that you are passionately in love with that lady, and that is why——'

'Not another word,' exclaimed James Wyatt, 'there's the luncheon-bell, and I must be off. You'd

better take Zola. You'll find him more amusing than the talk in the servants' hall.'

Melanie took the volume sullenly, and walked away without a word.

'What a little spitfire!' mused Mr. Wyatt, as he went slowly down the wide oak staircase. 'She has taken my pretty speeches seriously, and means to make herself obnoxious. This comes of putting one's self in the power of the inferior sex. If I had trusted a man, as I trusted that girl, it would have been a simple matter of business. He would have been extortionate, perhaps, and there an end. But Mademoiselle Duport makes it an affair of the heart, and I dare say will worry my life out before I have done with her.'

CHAPTER XIV.

SIR CYPRIAN HAS HIS SUSPICIONS.

Sir Cyprian Davenant had not forgotten that dinner at Richmond given by Gilbert Sinclair a little while before his departure for Africa, at which he had met the handsome widow to whom Mr. Sinclair was then supposed to be engaged. The fact was brought more vividly back to his mind by a circumstance that came under his notice the evening after he had accepted Lord Clanyarde's invitation to Marchbrook.

He had been dining at his club with an old college friend, and had consented, somewhat unwillingly, to an adjournment to one of the theatres near the Strand, at which a popular burlesque was being played for the three hundred and sixty-fifth time. Sir Cyprian entertained a cordial detestation of this kind of entertainment, in which the low comedian of the company enacts a distressed

damsel in short petticoats and a flaxen wig, while pretty actresses swagger in costumes of the cavalier period, and ape the manners of the music-hall swell. But it was ten o'clock. The friends had recalled all the old Oxford follies in the days when they were undergraduates together in Tom Quad. They had exhausted these reminiscences and a magnum of Lafitte, and though Sir Cyprian would have gladly gone back to his chambers and his books, Jack Dunster, his friend, was of a livelier temperament, and wanted to finish the evening.

'Let's go and see "Hercules and Omphale" at the Kaleidoscope,' he said. 'It's no end of fun. Jeemson plays Omphale in a red wig, and Minnie Vavasour looks awfully fascinating in pink satin boots and a lion-skin. We shall be just in time for the break-down.'

Sir Cyprian assented with a yawn. He had seen fifty such burlesques as 'Hercules and Omphale,' in the days when such things had their charm for him too, when he could be pleased with a pretty girl in pink satin Hessians, or be moved to laughter by Jeemson's painted nose and falsetto scream.

They took a hansom and drove to the Kaleidoscope, a bandbox of a theatre screwed into an awkward corner of one of the narrowest streets in London—a street at which well-bred carriage horses accustomed to the broad thoroughfares of Belgravia shied furiously.

It was December, and there was no one worth speaking of in town; but the little Kaleidoscope was crowded notwithstanding. There were just a brace of empty stalls in a draughty corner for Sir Cyprian and Mr. Dunster.

The breakdown was on, the pretty little Hercules flourishing his club, and exhibiting a white round arm with a diamond bracelet above the elbow. Omphale was showing her ankles to the delight of the groundlings, the violins were racing one another, and the flute squeaking its shrillest in a vulgar nigger melody, accentuated by rhythmical bangs on the big drum. The audience was in raptures, and rewarded the exertions of band and dancers with a double recall. Sir Cyprian stifled another yawn and looked round the house.

Among the vacuous countenances all intent on the

spectacle, there was one face which was out of the common, and which expressed a supreme weariness. A lady was sitting alone in a stage box, with one rounded arm resting indolently on the velvet cushion —an arm that might have been carved in marble, bare to the elbow, its warm human ivory relieved by the yellow hue of an old Spanish point ruffle. Where had Cyprian Davenant seen that face before?

The lady had passed the first bloom of youth but her beauty was of the character that does not fade with youth. She was of the Pauline Borghese type, a woman worthy to be modelled by a new Canova.

'I remember,' said Sir Cyprian to himself. 'It was at that Richmond dinner I met her. She is the lady Gilbert Sinclair was to have married.'

He felt a curious interest in this woman whose name even he had forgotten. Why had not Sinclair married her? She was strikingly handsome, with a bolder, grander beauty than Constance Clanyarde's fragile and poetic loveliness—a woman whom such a man as Sinclair might have naturally chosen. Just as such a man would choose a high-stepping chestnut

horse, without being too nice as to fineness and delicacy of line.

'And I think from the little I saw that the lady was attached to him,' mused Sir Cyprian.

He glanced at the stage box several times before the end of the performance. The lady was quite alone, and sat in the same attitude, fanning herself languidly, and hardly looking at the stage. Just as the curtain fell, Sir Cyprian heard the click of the box door, and looking up saw that a gentleman had entered. The lady rose, and the gentleman came a little forward to assist in the arrangement of her ermine-lined mantle.

It was Gilbert Sinclair.

'What did you think of it?' asked Jack Dunster as they went out into the windy lobby where people were crowded together waiting for their carriages.

'Abominable,' murmured Sir Cyprian.

'Why, Minnie Vavasour is the prettiest actress in London, and Jeemson's almost equal to Toole.'

'I beg your pardon. I was not thinking of the burlesque,' answered Sir Cyprian, hastily.

Gilbert and his companion were just in front of them.

'Shall I go and look for your carriage?' asked Mr. Sinclair.

'If you like,' answered the lady. 'But as you left me to sit out this dreary rubbish by myself all the evening, you might just as well have let me find my way to my carriage.'

'Don't be angry with me for breaking my engagement. I was obliged to go out shooting with some fellows, and I didn't leave Maidstone till nine o'clock. I think I paid you a considerable compliment in travelling thirty miles to hand you to your carriage. No other woman could exact so much from me.'

'You are not going back to Davenant to-night?'

'No, there is a supper on at the Albion. Lord Colsterdale's trainer is to be there, and I expect to get a wrinkle or two from him. A simple matter of business, I assure you.'

'Mrs. Walsingham's carriage,' roared the waterman.

'Mrs. Walsingham,' thought Sir Cyprian, who

was squeezed into a corner with his friend, walled up by opera-cloaked shoulders, and within ear-shot of Mr. Sinclair. 'Yes, that's her name.'

'That saves you all trouble,' said Mrs. Walsingham. 'Can I set you down anywhere?'

'No, thanks; the Albion's close by.'

Sir Cyprian struggled out of his corner just in time to see Gilbert shut the brougham door and walk off through the December drizzle.

'So that acquaintance is not a dropped one,' he thought. 'It augurs ill for Constance.'

Three days later he was riding out Barnet way, in a quiet country lane, as rural and remote in aspect as an accommodation road in the shires, when he passed a brougham with a lady in it—Mrs. Walsingham again, and again alone.

'This looks like fatality,' he thought.

He had been riding Londonwards, but turned his horse and followed the carriage. This solitary drive, on a dull, gray winter day, so far from London, struck him as curious. There might be nothing really suspicious in the fact. Mrs. Walsingham might have friends in this northern district. But

after what he had seen at the Kaleidoscope, Sir Cyprian was inclined to suspect Mrs. Walsingham. That she still cared for Sinclair he was assured. He had seen her face light up when Gilbert entered the box—he had seen that suppressed anger which is the surest sign of a jealous, exacting love. Whether Gilbert still cared for her was an open question. His meeting her at the theatre might have been a concession to a dangerous woman rather than a spontaneous act of devotion.

Sir Cyprian followed the brougham into the sequestered village of Totteridge, where it drew up before the garden gate of a neat cottage, with green blinds, and a half-glass door; a cottage which looked like the abode of a spinster annuitant.

Here Mrs. Walsingham alighted and went in, opening the half-glass door with the air of a person accustomed to enter.

He rode a little way further, and then walked his horse gently back. The brougham was still standing before the garden gate, and Mrs. Walsingham was walking up and down a gravel path by the side of the house with a woman and a child, a

child in a scarlet hood, just able to toddle along the path, sustained on each side by a supporting hand.

'Some poor relation's child, perhaps,' thought Cyprian. 'A friendly visit on the lady's part.'

He had ridden further than he intended, and stopped at the little inn to give his horse a feed of corn and an hour's rest, while he strolled through the village and looked at the old-fashioned churchyard. The retired spot was not without its interest. Yonder was Coppet Hall, the place Lord Melbourne once occupied, and which at a later period passed into the possession of the author of that splendid series of novels which reflect, as in a magic mirror, all the varieties of life from the age of Pliny to the eve of the Franco-Prussian war.

'Who lives in that small house with the green blinds?' asked Sir Cyprian of the ostler, as he mounted his horse to ride home.

'It's been took furnished, sir, by a lady from London, for her nurse and baby.'

'Do you know the lady's name?'

'I can't say that I do, sir. They has their beer

from the brewer, and pays ready money for everythink. But I see the lady's brougham go by not above half an hour ago.'

'Curious,' thought Sir Cyprian. 'Mrs. Walsingham is not rising in my opinion.'

CHAPTER XV.

'THEY LIVE TOO LONG WHO HAPPINESS OUTLIVE.'

In accepting Lord Clanyarde's invitation Cyprian Davenant had but one thought, one motive. He wanted to be near Constance. Not to see her. Dear as she still was to him, he had no desire to see her. He knew that such a meeting could bring with it only bitterness for both. But he wanted to be near her, to ascertain, at once and for ever, the whole unvarnished truth as to her domestic life, the extent of her unhappiness, if she was unhappy. Rumour might exaggerate. Even the practical solicitor, James Wyatt, might represent the state of affairs as worse than it was. The human mind leans to vivid colouring, and bold dramatic effect. An ill-used wife and a tyrannical husband present one of those powerful pictures which society contemplates with interest. Society—represented generally by Lord Dundreary—likes to pity, just as it likes to wonder.

At Marchbrook, Sir Cyprian was likely to learn the truth, and to Marchbrook he went, affecting an interest in pheasants, and in Lord Clanyarde's conversation, which was like a rambling and unrevised edition of the Greville Memoirs, varied with turf reminiscences.

There was wonderfully fine weather in that second week of December; clear autumnal days, blue skies and sunny mornings. The pheasants were shy, and after the first day Sir Cyprian left them to their retirement, preferring long lonely rides among the scenes of his boyhood, and half-hours of friendly chat with ancient gaffers and goodies who remembered his father and mother, and the days when Davenant had still held up its head in the occupation of the old race.

'This noo gentleman, he do spend a power o' money; but he'll never be looked up to like old Sir Cyprian,' said a gray-headed village sage, leaning over his gate to talk to young Sir Cyprian.

In one of his rounds Cyprian Davenant looked in upon the abode of Martha Briggs, who was still at home.

Her parents were in decent circumstances, and not eager to see their daughter 'suited' with a new service.

Martha remembered Sir Cyprian as a friend of Mrs. Sinclair's before her marriage. She had seen them out walking together in the days when Constance Clanyarde was still in the nursery: for Lord Clanyarde's youngest daughter had known no middle stage between the nursery and her Majesty's drawing-room. Indeed, Martha had had her own ideas about Sir Cyprian, and had quite made up her mind that Miss Constance would marry him.

She was therefore disposed to be confidential, and with very slight encouragement told Cyprian all about that sad time at Schönesthal, how her mistress had nursed her through the scarlet fever, and how the sweetest child that ever lived had been drowned, owing to that horrid French girl's carelessness.

'It's all very well to boast of jumping into the river to save the darling,' exclaimed Martha, 'but why did she go and take the precious pet into a dangerous place? When I had her I could see danger beforehand. I didn't want to be told that a

hill was steep, or that grass was slippery. I never did like foreigners, and now I hate them like poison,' cried Miss Briggs, as if under the impression that the whole continent of Europe was implicated in Baby Christabel's death.

'It must have been a great grief to Mrs. Sinclair,' said Sir Cyprian.

'Ah, poor dear, she'll never hold up her head again,' sighed Martha. 'I saw her in church last Sunday, in the beautifullest black bonnet, and if ever I saw any one going to heaven it's her. And Mr. Sinclair will have a lot of company, and there are all the windows at Davenant blazing with light till past twelve o'clock every night—my cousin James is a pointsman on the South-Eastern, and sees the house from the line—while that poor sweet lady is breaking her heart.'

'But surely Mr. Sinclair would defer to his wife in these things?' suggested Sir Cyprian.

'Not he, sir. For the last twelve months that I was with my dear lady I seldom heard him say a kind word to her. Always snarling and sneering. I do believe he was jealous of that precious innocent

because Mrs. Sinclair was so fond of her. I'm sure if it hadn't been 'for that dear baby my mistress would have been a miserable woman.'

This was a bad hearing, and Sir Cyprian went back to Marchbrook that evening sorely depressed.

He had declined to visit Davenant with Lord Clanyarde, owning frankly that there was no friendly feeling between Gilbert Sinclair and himself. Lord Clanyarde perfectly understood the state of the case, but affected to be supremely ignorant. He was a gentleman whose philosophy was to take things easy. Not to disturb Camerina, or any other social lake beneath whose tranquil water there might lurk a foul and muddy bottom, was a principle with Lord Clanyarde. But the nobleman, though philosophic and easy tempered, was not without a heart. There was a strain of humanity in the sybarite and worldling, and when, at a great dinner at Davenant, he saw the impress of a broken heart upon the statuesque beauty of his daughter's face, he was touched with pity and alarm. To sell his daughter to the highest bidder had not seemed to him in any wise a crime; but he would not have sold her to age or

deformity, or to a man of notoriously evil life. Gilbert Sinclair had appeared to him a very fair sample of the average young Englishman. Not stainless, perhaps. Lord Clanyarde did not inquire too closely into details. The suitor was good-looking, good-natured, open-handed, and rich. What more could any dowerless young woman require?

Thus had Lord Clanyarde reasoned with himself when he hurried on his youngest daughter's marriage; and, having secured for her this handsome establishment, he had given himself no further concern about her destiny. No daughter of the house of Clanyarde had ever appeared in the divorce court. Constance was a girl of high principles—always went to church on saints' days, abstained in Lent, and would be sure to go on all right.

But at Davenant, on this particular evening, Lord Clanyarde saw a change in his daughter that chilled his heart. He talked to her, and she answered him absently, with the air of one who only half understands. Surely this argued something more than grief for her dead child.

He spoke to Gilbert Sinclair, and gave frank utterance to his alarm.

'Yes, she is very low-spirited,' answered Gilbert, carelessly, 'still fretting for the little girl. I thought it would cheer her to have people about her—prevent her dwelling too much upon that unfortunate event. But I really think she gets worse. It's rather hard upon me. I didn't marry to be miserable.'

'Have you had a medical opinion about her?' asked Lord Clanyarde, anxiously.

'Oh, yes, she has her own doctor. The little old man who used to attend her at Marchbrook. She prefers him to any other doctor, and he knows her constitution, no doubt. He prescribes tonics, and so on, and recommends change of scene by and by, when she gets a little stronger; but my own opinion is that if she would only make an effort, and not brood upon the past, she'd soon get round again. Oh, by the way, I hear you have Sir Cyprian Davenant staying with you.'

'Yes, he has come down to shoot some of my pheasants.'

'I didn't know you and he were so thick.'

'I have known him ever since he was a boy, and knew his father before him.'

'I wonder, as your estates joined, you did not knock up a match between him and Constance.'

'That wouldn't have been much good, as he couldn't keep his estate.'

'No. It's a pity that old man in Lincolnshire didn't take it into his head to die a little sooner.'

'I find no fault with destiny for giving me you as a son-in-law, and I hope you are not tired of the position,' said Lord Clanyarde, with a look that showed Gilbert he must pursue his insinuations no further.

Lord Clanyarde went home and told Sir Cyprian what he had seen, and his fears about Constance. He reproached himself bitterly for his share in bringing about the marriage, being all the more induced to regret that act now that change of fortune had made Cyprian Davenant almost as good a match as Gilbert Sinclair.

'How short-sighted we mortals are!' thought the

anxious father. 'I did not even know that Cyprian had a rich bachelor uncle.'

Sir Cyprian heard Lord Clanyarde's account in grave silence.

'What do you mean to do?' he asked.

'What can I do? Poor child, she is alone, and must bear her burden unaided. I cannot come between her and her husband. It would take very little to make me quarrel with Sinclair, and then where should we be? If she had a mother living it would be different.'

'She has sisters,' suggested Cyprian.

'Yes, women who are absorbed by the care of their own families, and who would not go very far out of their way to help her. With pragmatical husbands, too, who would make no end of mischief if they were allowed to interfere. No, we must not make a family row of the business. After all, there is no specific ground for complaint. She does not complain, poor child. I'll go to Davenant early to-morrow and see her alone. Perhaps I can persuade her to be frank with me.'

'You might see the doctor, and hear his account of her,' said Cyprian.

'Yes, by the way, little Dr. Webb, who attended my girls from their cradles. An excellent little man. I'll send for him to-morrow and consult him about my rheumatism. He must know a good deal about my poor child.'

Lord Clanyarde was with his daughter soon after breakfast next morning. He found her in that pretty old-fashioned apartment called the balcony room, which had been Christabel's day nursery, and which had a door of communication with Mrs. Sinclair's dressing-room. It was the end of the north wing, and was overlooked by the window of Gilbert's study—study *par excellence*—but dressing room and gunnery in fact.

Constance received her father with affection, but he could not win her confidence. It might be that she had nothing to confide. She made no complaint against her husband.

'Why do I find you sitting here alone, Constance, while the house is full of cheerful people?' asked Lord Clanyarde. 'I heard the billiard

balls going as I came through the hall, early as it is.'

'Gilbert likes company and I do not,' answered Constance, quietly. 'We each take our own way.'

'That does not sound like a happy union, pet,' said her father.

'Did you expect me to be happy—with Gilbert Sinclair?'

'Yes, my love, or I would never have asked you to marry him. No, Constance. Of course it was an understood thing with me that you must marry well, as your sisters had done before you; but I meant you to marry a man who would make you happy; and if I find that Sinclair ill-uses you, or slights you, egad, he shall have no easy reckoning with me.'

'My dear father, pray be calm. He is very good to me. I have never complained—I never shall complain. I try to do my duty, for I know that I have done him a wrong, for which a life of duty and obedience can hardly atone.'

'Wronged him, child! How have you wronged him?'

'By marrying him when my heart was given to another.'

'Nonsense, pet; a mere school-girl penchant. If that kind of thing were to count, there's hardly a wife living who has not wronged her husband. Every romantic girl begins by falling in love with a detrimental; but the memory of that juvenile attachment has no more influence on her married life than the recollection of her favourite doll. You must get such silly notions out of your head. And you should try to be a little more lively, and join in Sinclair's amusements. No man likes a gloomy wife. And remember, love, the past is past—no tears can bring back our losses. If they could, hope would prevent our crying, as somebody judiciously observes.'

Constance sighed and was silent, whereupon Lord Clanyarde embraced his daughter tenderly and departed, feeling that he had done his duty. She was much depressed, poor child, but no doubt time would set things right; and as to Sinclair's maltreating her, that was out of the question. No man above the working-classes ill-uses his wife

now-a-days. Lord Clanyarde made quite light of his daughter's troubles when he met Sir Cyprian at lunch. Sinclair was a good fellow enough at bottom, he assured Sir Cyprian; a little too fond of pleasure, perhaps, but with no harm in him, and Constance was inclined to make rather too much fuss about the loss of her little girl.

Sir Cyprian heard this change of tone in silence, and was not convinced. He contrived to see Dr. Webb, the Maidstone surgeon, that afternoon. He remembered the good-natured little doctor as his attendant in many a childish ailment, and was not afraid of asking him a question or two. From him he heard a very bad account of Constance Sinclair. Dr. Webb professed himself fairly baffled. There was no bodily ailment, except want of strength; but there was a settled melancholy, a deep and growing depression for which medicine was of no avail.

'You'll ask why I don't propose getting a better opinion than my own,' said Dr. Webb, 'and I'll tell you why. I might call in half the great men in London and be no wiser than I am now.

They would only make Mrs. Sinclair more nervous, and she is very nervous already. I am a faithful watch-dog, and at the first indication of danger I shall take measures.'

'You don't apprehend any danger to the mind?' asked Sir Cyprian, anxiously.

'There is no immediate cause for fear. But if this melancholy continues, if the nervousness increases, I cannot answer for the result.'

'You have told Mr. Sinclair as much as this?'

'Yes, I have spoken to him very frankly.'

It would have been difficult to imagine a life more solitary than that which Constance Sinclair contrived to lead in a house full of guests. For the first two or three weeks she had bravely tried to sustain her part as hostess; she had pretended to be amused by the amusements of others, or, when unable to support even that poor simulation, had sat at her embroidery frame, and given the grace of her presence to the assembly. But now she was fain to hide herself all day long in her own rooms, or to walk alone in the fine old park, restricting her public appearance to the evening,

when she took her place at the head of the dinner table, and endured the frivolities of the drawing-room after dinner.

Gilbert secretly resented this withdrawal, and refused to believe that the death of Baby Christabel was his wife's sole cause of grief. There was something deeper—a sorrow for the past—a regret that was intensified by Sir Cyprian's presence in the neighbourhood.

'She knows of his being at Marchbrook, of course,' Gilbert told himself. 'How do I know they have not met? She lives her own life, almost as much apart from me as if we were in separate houses. She has had time and opportunity for seeing him, and in all probability he is at Marchbrook only for the sake of being near her.'

But Sir Cyprian had been at Marchbrook a week, and had not seen Constance Sinclair. How the place would have reminded him of her, had not her image been always present with him in all times and places! Every grove and meadow had its memory, every change in the fair pastoral landscape its bitter-sweet association.

Marchbrook and Davenant were divided in some parts by an eight-foot wall, in others by an oak fence. The Davenant side of the land adjoining Marchbrook was copse and wilderness, which served as covert for game. The Marchbrook side was a wide stretch of turf, which Lord Clanyarde let off as grazing land to one of his tenants. A railed in plantation here and there supported the fiction that this meadow land was a park, and for his own part Lord Clanyarde declared that he would just as soon look at oxen as at deer.

The only estimable feature of Marchbrook Park was its avenues. One of these, known as the Monk's Avenue, and supposed to have been planted in the days when Marchbrook was a Benedictine monastery, was a noble arcade of tall elms, planted a hundred feet apart, with a grassy road between them. The monastery had long vanished, leaving not a wrack behind, and the avenue now led only from wall to wall. The owners of Davenant had built a classic temple, or summer-house, at the end of this avenue, close against the boundary wall between the two estates, in order to secure the

enjoyment of this vista, as it was called in the days of Horace Walpole. The windows of the summer-house looked down the wide avenue to the high road, a distance of a little more than a quarter of a mile.

This summer-house had always been a favourite resort of Mrs. Sinclair's. It overlooked the home of her youth, and she liked it on that account, for although Davenant was by far the more beautiful estate, she loved Marchbrook best.

CHAPTER XVI.

'GRIEF FILLS THE ROOM UP OF MY ABSENT CHILD.'

SIR CYPRIAN had told himself that, in coming to Marchbrook, nothing was further from his thoughts than the desire to see Constance Sinclair; yet now that he was so near her, now that he was assured of her unhappiness, the yearning for one brief meeting, one look into the sweet eyes, one pressure of the gentle hand that used to lie so trustingly in his own, grew upon him hourly, until he felt that he could not leave Marchbrook without having seen her. No motive, no thought that could have shadowed the purity of Gilbert Sinclair's wife, had his soul's desire been published to the world, blended with this yearning of Sir Cyprian's. Deepest pity and compassion moved him. Such sorrow, such loneliness as Constance Sinclair's were sacred to the man who had loved and surrendered Constance Clanyarde.

Sir Cyprian lingered at Marchbrook, and spent the greater part of his days in riding or walking over familiar ground. He was too much out of spirits to join Lord Clanyarde in the slaughter of innocent birds, and was not a little bored by that frivolous old gentleman's society in the winter evenings by the fire in the comfortable bachelor smoking-room—the one really snug apartment in that great bare house. Every night Sir Cyprian made up his mind to depart next morning; yet when morning came he still lingered.

One bright bleak day, when there were flying snowstorms and intervals of sun and blue sky, Sir Cyprian—having actually packed his portmanteau and made arrangements for being driven to the station to catch an afternoon train—took a final ramble in Marchbrook Park. He had not once put his foot on the soil that had been his, but he could get a peep at the old place across the fence. There was a melancholy pleasure in looking at those wintry glades, the young fir trees, the scudding rabbits, the screaming pheasants, the withered bracken.

The sun had been shining a few minutes ago.

Down came the snow in a thick driving shower, almost blinding Sir Cyprian, as he walked swiftly along by the oak fence. Presently he found himself at the end of the Monk's Avenue, and under that classic temple which was said to be built upon the very spot where the Benedictines once had their chapel.

Ten years ago that temple had been Cyprian Davenant's summer retreat. He had made it his smoking-room and study—had read Thucydides and the Greek dramatists there in the long vacation—had there read those books of modern travel which had fired his mind with a longing for the adventures, perils, and triumphs of the African explorer. Twenty years ago it had been his mother's chosen resort. He had spent many a summer morning, many a pensive twilight there, by his mother's side, watching her sketch or hearing her play. The old-fashioned square piano was there still, perhaps, and the old engravings on the walls.

'Poor old place,' he thought, 'I wonder if any one ever goes there now, or if it is quite given up to bats and owls, and the spirits of the dead?'

He stopped under the stone balcony which overhung Marchbrook, on a level with the eight-foot wall. In Gilbert Sinclair's—or his architect's—plan of improvements, this classic summer house, a relic of a departed taste, had been forgotten. Sir Cyprian was glad to find it unchanged, unchanged in any wise, save that it had a more forlorn and neglected air than of old. The stonework of the balcony was green and gray with mosses and lichens. The framework of the window had not been painted for a quarter of a century. The ivy had wandered as it listed over brickwork and stone, darting sharp forked tongues of green into the crevices of the decaying mortar. Sir Cyprian looked up at the well-remembered window, full of thoughts of the past.

'Does she ever come here, I wonder?' he said to himself; 'or do they use the old place for a tool-house or an apple shed?'

Hardly, for there fell upon his ear a few bars of plaintive symphony, played on a piano of ancient tone—the pensive Broadwood dear to his childhood, —and then a voice, the pure and sweet contralto he

knew too well, began Lord Houghton's pathetic ballad, 'Strangers yet.'

He listened as if he lived but to hear. Oh, what profound melancholy there was in that voice, pouring out its sweetness to the silent walls! Regret, remorse, sorrow too great for common language to express, were breathed in that flood of melody. And when the song was done the singer's hands fell on the keys in a crashing chord; and a wild cry—the sudden utterance of uncontrollable despair—went up to heaven.

She was there—so near him—alone in her anguish. She, the only woman he had ever truly loved, the woman for whom he would have given his life as freely as he would have spilled a cup of water upon the ground, and with as little thought of the sacrifice.

The lower edge of the balcony was within reach of his hand. The century-old ivy would have afforded easy footing for a less skilled athlete. To climb the ascent was simple as to mount the rigging of his yacht.

In a minute, before he had time to think, he was

in the balcony, he had opened the French window, he was standing in the room!

Constance Sinclair sat by the piano, her arms folded on the old mahogany lid, her drooping head resting on her arms, her face hidden. She was too deeply lost in that agony of hopeless grief to hear the rattling of the frail casement, the footstep on the floor.

'Constance!'

She started up and confronted him, pale as ashes, with a smothered scream.

'My dearest, I heard your grief. I could not keep away. Only for a few minutes, Constance; only for a few words, and I will leave you. Oh, my love, how changed, how changed!'

A flood of crimson rushed into the pale face, and as quickly faded. Then she gave him her hand, with an innocent frankness that went to his heart, so like the Constance of old—the pure and perfect type of girlhood that knows not sin.

'I do not mind *you* hearing me in my sorrow,' she said, sadly. 'I come here because I feel myself away from all the world. At the house servants

come to my room with messages, and worry me. Would I like this? Will I do the other? What carriage will I drive in? at what time? A hundred questions that are so tiresome when one is tired of life. Here I can lock my door, and feel as much alone as in a desert.'

'But, dear Mrs. Sinclair, it is not good for you to abandon yourself to such grief.'

'How can I help it? "Grief fills the room up of my absent child!"' with a sad smile. 'You heard of my loss, did you not? The darling who made life so bright for me—snatched away in a moment—not one hour's warning. I woke that morning a proud and happy mother, and at night——! No, no one can imagine such a grief as that.'

'I have heard the sad story. But be sure Heaven will send comfort—new hopes——'

'Don't talk to me like that. Oh, if you knew how I have had Heaven and the Bible thrown at my head—by people who talk by rote. I can read my Bible. I read of David and his great despair, how he turned his face to the wall, how he wept again for Absalom; and of the Shunammite woman who

said, "It is well;" but David had many children, and the Shunammite's child was given back to her. God will not give my darling back to me.'

'He will—in heaven.'

'But my heart is breaking for want of her here. She will be an angel before the throne of God—not my Christabel. I want my darling as she was on earth, with her soft clinging arms—not always good—naughty sometimes, but always dearer than my life.'

What could Sir Cyprian say to comfort this bereaved heart? He could only sit down quietly by Constance Sinclair's side, and win her to talk of her sorrow, far more freely and confidingly than she had talked to her father; and this he felt was something gained. There was comfort in this free speech—comfort in pouring her sorrow into the ear of a friend who could verily sympathize.

'Dear Mrs. Sinclair,' said Sir Cyprian, gravely, when he had allowed her to tell the story of her bereavement, 'as a very old friend—one who has your welfare deep at heart—I must entreat you to struggle against this aborbing grief. I have seen

Dr. Webb, and he assures me that unless you make an effort to overcome this melancholy your mind as well as your body will suffer. Yes, Constance, reason itself may give way under the burden you impose upon it. Perhaps no one else would have the courage to speak to you so plainly, but I venture to speak as a brother might to a fondly loved sister. This may be our last meeting ; for I shall go back to Africa as soon as I can get my party together again. You will try, dear friend, will you not, for my sake—for the sake of your husband——'

'My husband!' she exclaimed, with a shudder. 'He has billiards, and guns, and race-horses, and friends without number. What can it matter to him that I grieve for my child? Somebody had need be sorry. He does not care.'

'Constance, it would matter very much to your father, to all who have ever loved you, to yourself most of all, if you should end your life in a lunatic asylum.'

This startled her, and she looked up at him earnestly.

'Unreasonable grief sometimes leads to madness.

Despair is rebellion against God. If the Shunammite in that dark day could say, "It shall be well," shall a Christian have less patience—a Christian who has been taught that those who mourn are blessed, and shall be comforted? Yes, Constance, they shall be comforted. Have faith in that divine promise, and all will be well.'

'I will try,' she answered, gently. 'It is very good of you to reason with me. No one else has spoken so frankly. They have only talked platitudes, and begged me to divert my mind. As if acted charades, or billiards, or bézique could fill up the gap in my life. Are you really going to Africa very soon?

'Early in the new year, perhaps; but I shall not go till I have heard from some reliable source that you are happy.'

'You must not wait for that. I shall never know happiness again in this world. At most I can but try to bear my lot patiently, and put on cheerful looks. I shall try to do that, believe me. Your lesson shall not be wasted. And now, I suppose, we must say good-bye,' looking at her watch. 'It is time for me to go back to the house.'

'I will not detain you, but before I go I must apologize for my burglarious entrance by that window. I hope I did not frighten you.'

'I was only startled. It seemed almost a natural thing to see you here. I remember how fond you were of this summer-house when I was a child. I have so often seen you sitting in that window smoking and reading.'

'Yes, I have spent many an hour here puzzling over the choruses in "Prometheus," and I have looked up from my book to see you scamper by on your pony.'

'Pepper, the gray one,' cried Constance, absolutely smiling; 'such a dear pony! We used to feed him with bread and apples every morning. Ah, what happy days those were!'

It touched him to the core of his heart to see the old girlish look come back in all its brightness. But it was only a transient gleam of the old light, which left a deeper sadness when it faded.

'Good-bye, Constance,' he said, taking both her hands. 'I may call you that for the last time.'

'Yes, and when you are in Africa—in another

world, far from all the false pretences and sham pleasures that make up life in this—think of me as Constance, the Constance you knew in the days that are gone—not as Gilbert Sinclair's wife.'

He bent his head over the unresisting hands and kissed them.

'God bless you and comfort you, my Constance,' he said gravely, 'and give you as much happiness as I lost when I made up my mind to live without you.'

He opened the window, and swung himself lightly down from the balcony to the turf below.

CHAPTER XVII.

A BALCONY SCENE.

Gilbert Sinclair and his chosen set—the half-dozen turfy gentlemen with whom he was united by the closest bonds of sympathy — had spent this December morning agreeably enough at a rustic steeplechase nine miles from Davenant. The race was an event of the most insignificant order—unchronicled in Ruff,—but there was pleasure in the drive to and fro on Mr. Sinclair's drag, through the keen frosty air, with an occasional diversion in the shape of a flying snowstorm, which whitened the men's rough overcoats, and hung on their beards and whiskers.

Just at the hour in which Sir Cyprian and Constance were bidding each other a long good-bye, Mr. Sinclair was driving his sorrel team back to Davenant at a slashing pace. He and his friends had enjoyed themselves very thoroughly at the homely

farmers' meeting. The sharp north wind had given a keen edge to somewhat jaded appetites, and game pie, anchovy sandwiches, cold grouse, and boar's head had been duly appreciated, with an *ad libitum* accompaniment of dry champagne, bitter beer, and Copenhagen Kirschen Wasser.

The gentlemen's spirits had been improved by the morning's sport, and the homeward drive was hilarious. It was now between three and four o'clock. There would be time for a quiet smoke, or a game at pyramids, and a fresh toilet before afternoon tea, opined such of the gentlemen as still held by that almost exploded superstition, a taste for ladies' society. The more masculine spirits preferred to smoke their Trabucas or Infantas by the harness-room fire, with the chance of getting the "straight tip" out of somebody else's groom.

James Wyatt was the only member of the party whose spirits were not somewhat unduly elated ; but then Mr. Wyatt was an outsider, only admitted on sufferance into that chosen band, as a fellow who might be useful on an emergency, and whom it was well to "square" by an occasional burst of civility.

He was one of those dangerous men who are always sober, and who find out everybody else's weak points, without ever revealing their own. He was Sinclair's *ame damnée*, however, and one must put up with him.

Gilbert was driving, with Sir Thomas Houndslow, a gentleman of turf celebrity, and late captain of a cavalry regiment, next him, smoking furiously, while Mr. Wyatt sat behind the two, and joined freely in the conversation, which inclined to the boisterous. How calm that smooth, level voice of his sounded after the strident tones of his companions, thickened ever so slightly by champagne and Kirschen Wasser!

The chief talk was of horses—the sorrels Gilbert was now driving—the horses they had seen that morning—with an inexhaustible series of anecdotes about horses that had been bought and sold, and bred, and exchanged, including the story of a rheumatic horse, which was a splendid goer in his intervals of good health, and was periodically sold by his owner, and taken back again at half-price when the fit came on.

James Wyatt admired the landscape, an enthusiasm which his companions looked down upon contemptuously from the serene height of a stolid indifference to art and nature.

'There's a glade!' cried the solicitor, pointing to an opening in the undulating woodland, where the snow-wreathed trees were like a picture of fairyland.

'Prettytidytimber,' assented Sir Thomas Houndslow, 'but for my part I could never see anything in trees to go into raptures about, except when you've sold 'em to a timber merchant. Shouldn't like to see cremation come into fashion, by-the-by. It would spoil the coffin trade and depreciate the value of my elms and oaks.'

As they approached Marchbrook, Mr. Wyatt began to talk about the Benedictines and their vanished monastery. He had found out all about it in the county history, its founder, the extent of its lands, the character of its architecture.

'That avenue must be six hundred years old,' he said as they came in sight of the tall elms.

'By Jove, that's queer,' cried Sir Thomas, pulling

out his race-glass. 'A fellow jumped out of that balcony like Romeo in the play.'

'Except that Romeo never scaled the balcony,' said Mr. Wyatt.

'That summer house is in your park, isn't it, Gilbert? Our friend's mode of exit suggests a flirtation between one of your guests and somebody at Marchbrook.'

'There's nobody at Marchbrook but old Clanyarde and Sir Cyprian Davenant,' said Sir Thomas, 'and I'll lay any odds you like it wasn't Lord Clanyarde jumped off that balcony.

Gilbert took the glass from his friend's hand without a word. The man who had jumped off the balcony was still in sight, walking at a leisurely pace along the wide alley of turf between the two rows of trees. The glass brought him near enough for recognition, and Mr. Sinclair had no doubt as to his identity.

'If you lay on to those leaders like that, you'll have this blessed machine in a ditch,' cried Sir Thomas Houndslow. 'What's the matter with you? The horses are stepping like clockwork.'

'Juno was breaking into a canter,' said Gilbert, colouring. 'Quiet, old lady, steady, steady.'

'*She's* steady enough,' said Sir Thomas, 'I think it's you that are wild. Memorandum, don't drink Kirschen Wasser after champagne when you're going to drive a team of young horses.'

Mr. Sinclair took the curve by the park gates in excellent style, despite this insinuation, and pulled up before the old Gothic porch with workmanlike precision.

'That's a very pretty bit of feather-edging,' said Sir Thomas, approvingly.

Gilbert did not wait to see his friends alight, but flung the reins to one of the grooms, and walked off without a word to any one.

He was at the summer-house ten minutes afterwards flushed and breathless, having run all the way. A flight of stone steps, moss-grown and broken, led up to the door of the temple.

Gilbert Sinclair tried the door, and found it locked.

'Is there any one in here?' he asked, shaking the crazy old door savagely.

'Who is that?' inquired Constance.

'Your husband.'

He heard her light footsteps coming towards the door. She opened it, and faced him on the threshold, with neither surprise nor fear in her calm, questioning face.

'Is there anything the matter, Gilbert? Am I wanted?'

'There is not much the matter, and I don't know that you are wanted in my house,' answered her husband, savagely. 'It seems to me that your vocation is elsewhere.'

His flushed face, the angry light in his red-brown eyes, told her that there was meaning in his reply, incomprehensible as it seemed.

'I don't understand you, Gilbert. What has happened to make you angry?'

'Not much, perhaps. It's bad form to make a fuss about it. But I am vulgar enough to think that when my wife plays Juliet to somebody else's Romeo it is time she should call herself by some other name than mine—which she disgraces. I admire the innocence of your astonished look. Unfortunately that

piece of finished acting is thrown away upon me. I saw your lover leave you.'

'Mr. Sinclair!' with a look of unspeakable indignation.

'Yes, your gentle Romeo forgot that this summer-house is seen from the high road. I saw him, I tell you, woman—I saw him leap down from the balcony—identified him with my field glass—not that I had any doubt who your visitor was.'

'I am sorry that you should be so angry at my seeing an old friend for a few minutes, Gilbert; and that you should make so very innocent an act an excuse for insulting me.'

'An old friend—a friend whom you meet clandestinely—in an out-of-the-way corner of the park—with locked doors.'

'I have spent all my mornings here of late. I lock my door in order to be undisturbed, so that anybody happening to come this way may believe the summer-house empty.'

'Any one except Sir Cyprian Davenant. He would know better.'

'Sir Cyprian's presence here to-day was the

merest accident. He heard me singing, and climbed up to the balcony to say a few kind words about my bereavement, which he knows to be the one absorbing thought of my mind just now. No friend, no brother, could have come with kinder or purer meaning. He gave me good advice, he warned me that there was selfishness and folly in giving way to sorrow. Not one word was spoken which you might not have freely heard, Gilbert, which you would not have approved.'

'Could any woman in your position say less? You all sing the same song. Once having made up your mind to betray your husband the rest is a matter of detail, and there is a miserable sameness in the details. Do you think anything you can say —oaths, tears—will ever convince me that you did not come here on purpose to meet that man, or that he came here to preach you a sermon upon your duty to me?'

'Gilbert, as I stand here, before God who sees and hears me, I have told you the truth! We have made a sad mistake in marrying; there are few things in which we sympathize; even our great

sorrow has not brought us nearer together; but if you will only be patient, if you will be kind and true to me, I will still try, even more earnestly than I have done yet, to make you a good wife, to make your home life happy.'

She came to him with a sad, sweet smile, and laid her hand gently on his shoulder, looking up at him with earnest eyes, full of truth and purity, could he but have understood their meaning.

Alas! to his dogged, brutal nature, purity like this was incomprehensible. Facts were against his wife, and he had no belief in her to sustain him against the facts. The lion of fable might recognise Una's purity and lie down at her feet; but Gilbert Sinclair was a good deal more like the lion of reality, a by no means magnanimous beast, who waits till he can pounce upon his enemy alone in a solitary corner, and has a prudent dread of numbers.

As the little hand alighted tremulously on his breast Gilbert Sinclair raised his clenched fist.

'Let me alone,' he cried. 'You've made your choice. Stick to it, ——'

And then came a word which had never before

been spoken in Constance Sinclair's hearing, but which some instinct of her woman's heart told her meant deepest infamy.

She recoiled from him with a little cry, and then fell like a log at his feet.

Lest that brutal word should too weakly express an outraged husband's wrath, Mr. Sinclair had emphasized it with a blow. That muscular fist of his, trained in many an encounter with professors of the noble art of self-defence, had been driven straight at his wife's forehead, and nothing but the man's blind fury had prevented the blow being mortal.

In intention, at least, he had been for the moment a murderer. His breath came thick and fast as he stood over that lifeless form.

'Have I killed her?' he asked himself. 'She deserves no better fate. But I had rather kill *him*.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

CYPRIAN'S VISITOR.

Sir Cyprian Davenant left Marchbrook an hour after his interview with Constance Sinclair. He sent his man home with the portmanteaus and gun-cases, and went straight to his club, where he dined. It was between eight and nine when he walked to his chambers through the snowy streets. The walk through the rough weather suited his present temper. He could have walked many a mile across a Yorkshire moor that night, in the endeavour to walk down the anxious thoughts that crowded upon his mind.

His interview with Constance—like all such meetings between those whom Fate has irrevocably parted—had deepened the gloom of his soul, and added to the bitterness of his regrets. It had brought the past nearer to him, and made the inevitable harder to bear than it had seemed yesterday.

He had seen all the old loveliness in the innocent face, changed though it was. He had heard all the old music in the unforgotten voice. To what end? That brief greeting across the iron gate of Destiny's prison-house only made it more agonizing to think of the long future in which these two, who had so met and touched hands across the gulf, must live their separated lives in silent patience.

The snow lay thick in the quiet turning out of the Strand. There was a hansom standing at the corner by Sir Cyprian's chambers, the horse hanging his head with a dejected air under his whitened rug; the man stamping up and down the pavement, and flapping his arms across his chest. The cab must have been waiting some time, Sir Cyprian thought, idly.

His chambers were on the first floor, large and lofty rooms facing the river. Since his inheritance of Colonel Gryffin's fortune he had indulged himself with that one luxury dear to men who love books, a well-arranged library. This bachelor *pied à terre* suited him better than lodgings in a more fashionable quarter. It was central, and out of the way of his

fashionable acquaintance—an ineligible feature which was to his mind an attraction.

Sir Cyprian admitted himself with his latch-key, and went up the dimly lighted staircase. He opened the outer door of his library, within which massive oak barrier there hung a heavy crimson cloth curtain, shutting out noise and draught. This curtain had been dragged aside, and left hanging in a heap at one end of the rod, in a very different style from the usual neat arrangement of folds left by the middle-aged valet.

The room was almost in darkness, for the fire had burned low upon the hearth. There was just light enough to show Sir Cyprian a figure sitting by the fire in a brooding attitude, alone, and in the dark.

'Who's that?' asked Sir Cyprian.

The man started up, a big man, tall and broad-shouldered, whom for the first moment Sir Cyprian took for a stranger.

'I should have thought you would have known Constance Sinclair's husband anywhere,' said the intruder. 'You and I have good reason to remember each other.'

'I beg your pardon, Mr. Sinclair,' Cyprian answered, quietly, without noticing the sneer; 'but as I do not possess the gift of seeing in the dark you can hardly wonder at my being slow to recognise you.'

He was not going to invite a quarrel with this man—nay, he would rather avoid one even at some loss of personal dignity, for Constance's sake. He went up to the hearth, where Gilbert had resumed his seat, and put his hand on the bell.

'Don't ring for lights,' said Sinclair. 'What I have to say can be said in the dark.'

'Perhaps. But I prefer to see a man's face when I'm talking to him. May I ask to what I am indebted for this unexpected pleasure? I thought you were at Davenant.'

'I left by the train after that in which you travelled.'

The man came in with a lighted lamp, which he placed on the table in front of the fire—a large carved oak table, loaded with classic volumes and ponderous lexicons; for a wealthy student is rarely content with a single lexicographer's definition.

Having set down the lamp the valet replenished the exhausted fire with that deliberate care so frequently to be observed in a servant who is slightly curious about his master's guest, and finally retired, with soft footfall, shutting the door after him very slowly, as if he expected to gather something at this last moment from the visitor's impatience to break covert.

In this case, however, the valet retired without hearing a word. Gilbert Sinclair sat staring at the fire, and seemed in no hurry to state his business. He could not fly at his enemy's throat like a tiger; and that was about the only thing to which his spirit moved him at this moment. Looking at his visitor by the clear light of the lamp, Sir Cyprian was not reassured by his countenance. Gilbert Sinclair's face was of a livid hue, save on each high cheek bone, where a patch of dusky red made the pervading pallor more obvious. His thick red brown hair was rough and disordered, his large red-brown eyes, prominently placed in their orbits, were bright and glassy, and the sensual under lip worked convulsively, as in some inward argument of a stormy kind.

For some minutes—three or four perhaps, and so brief a space of time makes a longish pause in a critical situation—Gilbert Sinclair kept silence. Sir Cyprian, standing with his back against one end of the velvet-covered mantelpiece, waited with polite tranquillity. Not by a word or gesture did he attempt to hurry his guest.

'Look you here, Sir Cyprian Davenant,' Gilbert began at last, with savage abruptness. 'If we had lived in the duelling days—the only days when Englishmen were gentlemen—I should have sent a friend to you to-night instead of coming myself, and the business might have been arranged in the easiest manner possible, and settled decisively before breakfast to-morrow. But as our new civilization does not allow of that kind of thing, and as I haven't quite strong enough evidence to go into the Divorce Court, I thought it was better to come straight to you and give you fair warning of what you may expect in the future.'

'Let us suppose that duelling is not an exploded custom. We have France and Belgium, and a few other countries at our disposal, if we should make up

our minds to fight. But I should like to know the ground of our quarrel before we go into details.'

'I am glad you are man enough to fight me,' answered the other, savagely. 'I don't think you can require to be told why I should like to kill you—or if you have been in doubt about it up to this moment you will know pretty clearly when I tell you that I saw you jump off the balcony of my wife's summer-house this afternoon.'

'I am sorry that unceremonious exit should offend you. I had no other way of getting back to Marchbrook in time for my train. I should have had to walk the whole width of Davenant Park and about a mile of high road if I had left by the summer-house door.'

'And you think it a gentlemanlike thing to be in my neighbourhood for a fortnight, to avoid my house, and to meet my wife clandestinely in a lonely corner of my park?'

'There was no clandestine meeting. You insult your wife by such a supposition, and prove—if proof were needed of so obvious a fact—your unworthiness of such a wife. My visit to the summer-house was

purely accidental. I heard Mrs. Sinclair singing—heard the bitter cry which grief—a mother's sacred grief—wrung from her in her solitude, and followed the impulse of the moment, which prompted me to console a lady whom I knew and loved when she was a child.'

'And afterwards, when she had ceased to be a child—a few months before she became my wife. Your attachment was pretty well known to the world in general, I believe. It was only I who was left in ignorance.'

'You might easily have known what the world knew—all there was to be known—simply nothing.'

'You deny that you have done me any wrong? that I have any right to ask you to fight me?'

'Most emphatically, and I most distinctly refuse to make a quarrel on any ground connected with your wife. But you will not find me slow to resent an insult should you be so ill-advised as to provoke me. As the friend of Constance Clanyarde I shall be very ready to take up the cudgels for Constance Sinclair, even against her husband. Remember this, Mr. Sinclair; and remember that any wrong done to

Lord Clanyarde's daughter will be a wrong that I shall revenge with all the power God has given me. She is not left solely to her husband's tender mercies.'

Even the dull red hue faded from Gilbert Sinclair's cheeks as he confronted the indignant speaker, and left him livid to the very lips. There was a dampness on his forehead, too, when he brushed his large strong hand across it.

'Is the man a craven?' thought Sir Cyprian, remarking these signs of agitation.

'Well,' said Sinclair, drawing a long breath, 'I suppose there is no more to be said. You both tell the same story—an innocent meeting, not preconcerted—mere accident. Yes, you have the best of me this time. The unlucky husband generally has the worst of it. There's no dishonour in lying to *him*. He's out of court, poor beggar.'

'Mr. Sinclair, do you want me to throw you out of that window?'

'I shouldn't much care if you did.'

There was a sullen misery in the answer, and in the very look and attitude of the man as he sat

beside his enemy's hearth, only looking up at intervals from his vacant stare at the fire, which touched Cyprian Davenant with absolute pity. Here was a man to whom Fate had given vast capabilities of happiness, and who had wantonly thrown away all that is fairest and best in life.

'Mr. Sinclair, upon my honour I am sorry for you,' he said, gravely. 'I am sorry for your incapacity to believe in a noble and pure-minded wife; sorry that you should poison your own life and your wife's by doubts that would never enter your mind if you had the power to understand her. Go home, and let your wife never know the wrong you have done her.'

'My wife! What wife? I have no wife,' said Sinclair, with a strange smile, rising and going to the door. 'That's what some fellow says in a play, I think. Good night, Sir Cyprian Davenant, and when next we meet I hope it may be on a better defined footing.'

He left the room without another word. Before Sir Cyprian's bell had summoned the smooth-faced valet, the street door shut with a bang, and Gilbert

Sinclair was gone. Sir Cyprian heard the doors of the hansom clapped to, and the crack of the weary driver's whip, as the wheels rolled up the silent street.

'What did he mean by that speech about his wife?' wondered Sir Cyprian. 'The man looked like a murderer.'

He did not know that at this moment Gilbert Sinclair was half afraid that brutal blow of his might have been fatal.

CHAPTER XIX.

MRS. WALSINGHAM BREAKS FAITH.

CHRISTMAS, which, in a common way, brings life and bustle and the gathering of many guests to good old country houses, brought only gloom and solitude to Davenant. Mr. Sinclair's visitors had departed suddenly, at a single flight, like swallows before a storm in autumn. Mrs. Sinclair was very ill—seriously ill—mysteriously ill. Her dearest friends shook their heads and looked awful things when they talked of her. It was mental, they feared.

'Poor dear thing! This comes of Lord Clanyarde's greediness in getting rich husbands for all his daughters.'

'The old man is a regular harpy,' exclaimed Mrs. Millamount, with a charming indifference to detail.

And then these fashionable swallows skimmed away to fresh woods and pastures new—or rather fresh billiard-rooms—and other afternoon teas,

evening part-songs, and morning rides in rustic English lanes, where there is beauty and fragrance even in mid-winter.

Constance had been missing at afternoon tea on the day of Gilbert's sudden journey to London, but her absence in the cosy morning-room, where Mrs. Millamount amused the circle by the daring eccentricity of her discourse, was hardly a subject of wonder.

'She has one of her nervous headaches, no doubt, poor child,' said Mrs. Millamount, taking possession of the tea-tray; 'she is just the kind of woman to have nervous headaches.'

'I'll give long odds you don't have them,' said Sir Thomas Houndslow, who was lolling with his back against the mantelpiece, to the endangerment of the porcelain that adorned it.

'Never had headache but once in my life, and that was when I came a cropper in the Quorn country,' replied Mrs. Millamount, graciously.

Vapours have given way to feminine athletics, and there is nothing now so dowdy or unfashionable as bad health.

When the dressing-bell rang and Mrs. Sinclair was still absent, Melanie Duport began to think there was some cause for alarm. Her mistress was punctual and orderly in all her habits. She had gone to walk in the park immediately after luncheon, quite three hours ago. She had no idea of going beyond the park, Melanie knew, as she only wore her sealskin jacket and a garden hat. She might have gone to Marchbrook, perhaps, in this careless attire, but not anywhere else; and her visits to Marchbrook were very rare.

Melanie was puzzled. She went downstairs and sent a couple of grooms in quest of her mistress. The gardeners had all gone home at five o'clock.

'You had better look in the summer-house by the fir plantation,' said Melanie; 'I know Mrs. Sinclair spends a good deal of her time there.'

The young men took the hint, and went straight off to the summer-house together, too social to take different directions, as Melanie had told them to do. They had plenty to talk about, the furious pace at which their master was going, the bad luck which had attended his racing stable lately, and so on.

'I think there's a curse on them buildings at Newmarket,' said one of the men. 'We haven't pulled off so much as a beggarly plate since they was finished.'

'There's a curse on buying half-bred colts,' retorted the older and wiser servant. 'That's where the curse is, Rogers, mistaken economy.'

The classic temple was wrapped in darkness, and Rogers, who entered first, stumbled over the prostrate form of his mistress. She lay just as she had fallen at her husband's feet, felled by his savage blow.

The elder man got a light out of his fusee box, and then they lifted the senseless figure into a chair, and looked at the white face, on which there were ghastly streaks of blood. Mrs. Sinclair groaned faintly as they raised her from the ground, and this was a welcome sound, for they had almost thought her dead.

There were some flowers in a vase on the table, and the elder groom dipped a handkerchief in the water and dabbed it on Mrs. Sinclair's forehead.

'I wish I'd got a drop of spirit in my pocket,' he

said; 'a sup of brandy might bring her round, perhaps. Look about if you can see anything in that way, Rogers.'

Rogers looked, but alcohol being an unknown want to Mrs. Sinclair, there was no convenient bottle to be found in the summer-house. She murmured something inarticulate; and the locked lips loosened and trembled faintly as the groom bathed her forehead.

"Poor thing, she must have had a fit,' said the elder man.

'Apocalyptic, perhaps,' suggested Rogers.

'We'd better carry her back to the house between us. She's only a feather weight, poor little thing.'

So the two grooms conveyed Mrs. Sinclair gently and carefully back to Davenant, and contrived to carry her up to her room by the servants' staircase without letting all the house into the secret.

'If it was a fit she won't like it talked about,' said the head groom to the housekeeper, as he refreshed himself with a glass of Glenlivat after his exertions.

'Master's gone up to London, too,' said the house-

keeper; 'that makes it awkward, don't it? I should think somebody ought to telegraph.'

Melanie Duport took charge of her mistress with a self-possession that would have done credit to an older woman.

She sent off at once for Dr. Webb, who came post haste to his most important patient.

The doctor found Mrs. Sinclair weak and low, and her mind wandering a little. He was much puzzled by that contusion on the fair forehead, but his patient could give him no explanation.

'I think I fell,' she said. 'It was kind of him to come to me, wasn't it, for the love of old times?'

'It must have been a very awkward fall,' said Dr. Webb to Melanie. 'Where did it happen?'

Melanie explained how her mistress had been found in the summer-house.

'She must have fallen against some piece of furniture—something with a blunt edge. It was an awful blow. She is very low, poor thing. The system has received a severe shock.'

And then Dr. Webb enjoined the greatest care, and questioned Melanie as to her qualifications for

the post of nurse. Mrs. Sinclair was not to be left during the night, and some one else must be got to-morrow to relieve Melanie. It was altogether a serious case.

Gilbert Sinclair returned next morning, haggard and gloomy, looking like a man who had spent his night at the gaming-table, with fortune steadily adverse to him. He met Dr. Webb in the hall, and was told that his wife was seriously ill.

'Not in danger?' he asked, eagerly.

'Not in immediate danger.'

'I thank God for that.'

It seemed a small thing to be thankful for, since the surgeon's tone was not very hopeful, but Gilbert Sinclair had been weighed down by the apprehension of something worse than this. He found James Wyatt alone in the billiard-room, and learned from him that his guests were already on the wing.

Three days later and Mr. Wyatt had also left Davenant, but not for good. He had promised to run down again in a week or so, to cheer his dear friend, who, although always treating him more or less *de haut en bas,* allowed him to see pretty plainly that

he was indispensable to his patron's contentment. And your modern Umbra will put up with a good deal of snubbing when he knows his patron is under his thumb.

Unfashionable as was the season, Mrs. Walsingham was still in town. She had no rustic retreat of her own, and she was not in that charmed circle, patrician or millionaire, which rejoices in country houses. Furthermore she abhorred the beauties of nature, and regarded winter residence in the country as an exile bleaker than Ovid's banishment to chill and savage Tomi. If she had been rich enough to have indulged her caprices, she would have liked to spend the New Year in Paris; but she had an income which just enabled her to live elegantly without any indulgence of caprices. This winter, too, she had peculiar reasons for staying in town, over and above all other motives. She stayed in the snug little house in Half-moon Street, therefore, and was 'at home' on Saturday evenings just as if the season had been at its flood. The society with which she filled her miniature drawing-room was literary, musical, artistic, dramatic, just the most delightful

society imaginable, with the faintest flavour of Bohemianism. She had chosen Saturday evening, because journalists, who were free on no other night, could drop in then, and Mrs. Walsingham adored journalists.

On this particular Saturday, three days after the scene in the summer-house, James Wyatt had made his appearance in the Half-moon Street drawing-room just when most people were going away. He contrived to outstay them all, though Mrs. Walsingham's manner was not so cordial as to invite him to linger. She yawned audibly behind the edge of her large black fan when Mr. Wyatt took up his stand in front of the chimney-piece, with the air of a man who is going to be a fixture for the next hour.

'Have you heard the news?' he asked, after a brief silence.

'From Davenant? Yes, I am kept pretty well *au courant*.'

'A sharp little thing, that Duport.'

'Very.'

Silence again, during which Mrs. Walsingham

surveyed her violet velvet gown and admired the Venice point flounce which relieved its sombre hue.

'Clara,' said James Wyatt, with a suddenness which startled the lady into looking up at him, 'I think I have performed my part of our bargain. When are you going to perform yours?'

'I don't quite understand you.'

'Oh, yes, you do, Mrs. Walsingham. There are some things that will hardly bear to be discussed, even between conspirators. I am not going to enter into details. When I found you in this room three years ago, on Gilbert Sinclair's wedding day, you had but one thought, one desire. Your whole being was athirst for revenge. You are revenged, and I have been the chief instrument in the realization of your wish. A wicked wish on your part. Doubly wicked on mine, with less passion and weaker hatred, to be your aider and abettor. *Soit.* I am content to bear the burden of my guilt, but not to be cheated of my reward. What I have done I have done for your sake—to win your love.'

'To buy me,' she said, 'as slaves are bought with a price. That's what you mean. You don't suppose I shall love you for working Gilbert Sinclair's ruin?'

'You wanted to see him ruined.'

'Yes, when I was mad with rage and grief. Did you think you were talking to a sane woman that evening after Gilbert's marriage? You were talking to a woman whose brain had been on fire with despair and jealousy through the long hours of that agonizing day. What should I long for *but* revenge, *then?*'

'Well, you have had your heart's desire, and it seems to me that your conduct since that day has been pretty consistent with the sentiments you gave expression to then. Do you mean to tell me that you are going to throw me over now,—that you are going to repudiate the promise you made me—a promise on which I have counted with unflinching faith in your honour?'

In my honour!' cried Mrs. Walsingham, with a bitter sneer, all the more bitter because it

was pointed against herself. 'In the honour of a woman who could act as I have acted?'

'I forgive anything to passion; but to betray *me* would be deliberate cruelty.'

'Would it?' she asked, smiling at him; 'I think it would be more cruel to keep my word and make your life miserable.'

'You shall make me as miserable as you please, if you will only have me,' urged Wyatt. 'Come, Clara, I have been your slave for the last three years. I have sacrificed sentiments which most men hold sacred to serve or to please you. It would be unparalleled baseness to break your promise.'

'My promise was wrung from me in a moment of blind passion,' cried Mrs. Walsingham. 'If the Prince of Darkness had asked me to seal a covenant with him that day, I should have consented as freely as I consented to your bargain.'

'The comparison is flattering to me,' replied Mr. Wyatt, looking at her darkly from under bent brows. There is a stage at which outraged love

turns to keenest hate, and James Wyatt's feelings were fast approaching that stage. 'In one word, do you mean to keep faith with me? Yes or no?'

'No,' answered Mrs. Walsingham, with a steady look which meant defiance. 'No, and again no. Tell the world what you have done, and how I have cheated you. Publish your wrongs if you dare. I have never loved but one man in my life, and his name is Gilbert Sinclair. And now good night, Mr. Wyatt, or rather, good morning, for it is Sunday, and I don't want to be late for church.'

CHAPTER XX.

DR. HOLLENDORF.

THE new year began with much ringing of parish bells, some genuine joviality in cottages and servants' halls, and various conventional rejoicings in polite society; but silence and solitude still reigned at Davenant. The chief rooms—saloon and dining-room, library and music-room—were abandoned altogether by the gloomy master of the house. They might as well have put on their holland pinafores and shut their shutters, as in the absence of the family, for nobody used them. Gilbert Sinclair lived in his snuggery at the end of the long gallery, ate and drank there, read his newspapers and wrote his letters, or smoked and dozed in the dull winter evenings. He rode a good deal in all kinds of weather, going far afield, no one knew where, and coming home at dusk splashed to the neck, and with his horse in a condition peculiarly aggravating to grooms and stable boys.

'Them there 'osses will 'ave mud fever before long,' said the hirelings, dejectedly. 'There's that blessed chestnut he set such store by a month ago with 'ardly a leg to stand on for windgalls, and the roan filly's over at knee a'ready.'

'He' meant Mr. Sinclair, who was riding his finest horses with a prodigal recklessness.

Constance Sinclair lived to see the new year, though she did not know why the church bells rang out on the silence of midnight. She started up from her pillow with a frightened look when she heard that joy-peal, crying out that those were her wedding bells, and that she must get ready for church.

'To please you, papa,' she said. 'For your sake, papa. Pity my broken heart.'

There had been days and nights, towards the end of the old year, when Dr. Webb trembled for the sweet young life which he had watched almost from its beginning. A great physician had come down from London every day, and had gone away with a fee proportionate to his reputation, after diagnosing and prognosing the disease in a most wonderful manner, but it was the little country apothecary who

saved Constance Sinclair's life. His watchfulness, his devotion, had kept the common enemy at bay. The life current, which had ebbed very low, flowed gradually back, and, after lying for ten days in an utterly prostrate and apathetic state, the patient was now strong enough to rise and be dressed, and lie on the sofa in her pretty morning-room, while Melanie, or honest Martha Briggs, who had come back to nurse her old mistress, read to her, to divert her mind, the doctor said; but, alas! as yet the mind seemed incapable of being awakened to interest in the things of this mortal life. When Constance spoke it was of the past—of her childhood or girlhood, of people and scenes familiar to her in that happy time. Of her husband she never spoke; and his rare visits to her room had a disturbing influence. So obvious was the disquietude caused by his presence, that Dr. Webb suggested that for the present Mr. Sinclair should refrain from seeing his wife.

'I can feel for you, my dear sir,' he said, sympathetically. 'I quite understand your anxiety, but you may trust me and the nurses. You will have

all intelligence of progress. The mind at present is somewhat astray.'

'Do you think it will be always so?' asked Sinclair. 'Will she never recover her senses?'

'My dear sir, there is everything to hope. She is so young, and the disease is altogether so mysterious; whether the effect of the blow—that unlucky fall—or whether simply a development of the brooding melancholy which we had to fight against before the accident, it is impossible to say. We are quite in the dark. Perfect seclusion and tranquillity may do much.'

Lord Clanyarde came to see his daughter nearly every day. He had stayed at Marchbrook on purpose to be near her. But his presence seemed to give Constance no pleasure. There were days on which she looked at him with a wandering gaze that went to his heart, or a blank and stony look that appalled him by its awful likeness to death. There were other days when she knew him; on those days her talk was all of the past, and it was clear that memory had taken the place of intelligence.

Lord Clanyarde felt all the pangs of remorse as

he contemplated this spectacle of a broken heart—a mind wrecked by sorrow.

'Yet I can hardly blame myself for her sad state, poor child,' he argued. 'She was happy enough, bright enough, before she lost her baby.'

The new year was a week old, and since that first rally there had been no change for the better in Constance Sinclair's condition, and now there came a decided change for the worse. Strength dwindled, a dull apathy took possession of the patient, and even memory seemed a blank.

Dr. Webb was in despair, and fairly owned his helplessness. The London physician came and went, and took his fee, and went on diagnosing with profoundest science, and tried the last resources of the pharmacopœia, with an evident conviction that he could minister to a mind diseased; but nothing came of his science, save that the patient grew daily weaker, as if fate and physic were too much for one feeble sufferer to cope withal.

Gilbert Sinclair was told that unless a change came very speedily his wife must die.

'If we could rouse her from this apathetic state,'

said the physician—'any shock—any surprise—especially of a pleasurable kind—that would act on the torpid brain, might do wonders even yet; but all our attempts to interest her have so far been useless.'

Lord Clanyarde was present when this opinion was pronounced. He went home full of thought—more deeply concerned for his daughter than he had ever been yet for any mortal except himself.

'Poor little Connie,' he thought, remembering her in her white frock and blue sash, 'she was always my favourite—the prettiest, the gentlest, the most high-bred of all my girls; but I didn't know she had such a hold upon my heart.'

At Marchbrook Lord Clanyarde found an unexpected visitor waiting for him—a visitor whom he received with a very cordial greeting.

* * * * * *

Soon after dusk on the following evening Lord Clanyarde returned to Davenant, but not alone. He took with him an elderly gentleman, with white hair, worn rather long, and a white beard—a person of almost patriarchal appearance, but somewhat

disfigured by a pair of smoke-coloured spectacles of the kind that are vulgarly known as gig lamps.

The stranger's clothes were of the shabbiest, yet even in their decay looked the garments of a gentleman. He wore ancient shepherd's plaid trousers, and a bottle-green overcoat of exploded cut.

Gilbert Sinclair was in the hall when Lord Clanyarde and his companion arrived. Mr. Wyatt had just come down from London, and the two men were smoking their cigars by the great hall fire—the noble open hearth with brazen dogs, which had succeeded the more mediæval fashion of a fire in the centre of the hall.

'My dear Sinclair,' began Lord Clanyarde, with a somewhat hurried and nervous air, which might be forgiven in a man whose favourite daughter languished between life and death, 'I have ventured to bring an old friend of mine, Dr. Hollendorf, a gentleman who has a great practice in Berlin, and who has had vast experience in the treatment of mental disorders. Dr. Hollendorf—Mr. Sinclair. I beg your pardon, Wyatt, how do ye do?' interjected Lord Clanyarde, offering the solicitor a couple of

fingers. 'Now, Gilbert, I should much like Dr. Hollendorf to see my poor Constance. It may do no good, but it can do no harm; and if you have no objection, with Dr. Webb's concurrence, of course, I should like——'

'Webb is in the house,' answered Gilbert. 'You can ask him for yourself. I have no objection.'

This was said with a weary air, as if the speaker had ceased to take any interest in life. Gilbert hardly looked at the German doctor; but James Wyatt, who was of a more observant turn, scrutinized him attentively.

'Here is Webb,' said Gilbert, as the little doctor came tripping down the great staircase, with the lightsome activity of his profession, washing his hands, in imaginary water, like Lady Macbeth, as he came.

Lord Clanyarde presented Dr. Hollendorf to the rural practitioner, and stated his wish. Dr. Webb had no objection to offer. Any wish of a father's must be sacred.

'You will come up and see her at once?' he said, interrogatively.

'At once,' answered the stranger, with a slightly guttural accent.

The three men went up the staircase, Gilbert remaining behind.

'Aren't you going?' asked Wyatt.

'No, my presence generally disturbs her. Why should I go? I'm not wanted.'

'I should go if I were you. How do you know what this man is? An impudent quack in all probability. You ought to be present.'

'Do you think so?'

'Decidedly.'

'Then I'll go.'

'Watch your wife when that man is talking to her,' said Wyatt, in a lower tone, as Gilbert moved away.

'What do you mean?' asked the other, turning sharply round.

'What I say. Watch your wife.'

Mrs. Sinclair's morning-room was a spacious old-fashioned apartment, with three long windows, one opening into a wide balcony from which an iron stair led down to a small and secluded garden, laid

out in the Dutch style, a garden which had been always sacred to the mistress of Davenant. There were heavy oak shutters, and a complicated arrangement of bolts and bars to the three windows; but, as these shutters were rarely closed, the stair and the balcony might be considered as a convenience specially provided for the benefit of burglars. No burglars had, however, yet been heard of at Davenant.

There was a piano in the room. There were well-filled bookcases, pictures, quaint old china—all things that make life pleasant to the mind that is at ease, and which may be supposed to offer some consolation to the care-burdened spirit. The fire blazed merrily, and on a sofa in front of it Constance reclined, dressed in a loose white cashmere gown, hardly whiter than the wasted oval face, from which the dark brown hair was drawn back by a band of blue ribbon, just as it had been ten years ago, when Constance was 'little Connie,' flitting about the lawn at Marchbrook like a white and blue butterfly.

'My pet,' said Lord Clanyarde, in a pleading tone, 'I have brought a new doctor to see you, a

gentleman who may be able to understand your case even better than our friend Webb.'

'No one ever knew her constitution as well as I do,' commented Dr. Webb, *sotto voce*.

Constance raised her heavy eyelids and looked at her father with a languid wonder, as if the figures standing by her couch were far away, and she saw them faintly in the distance without knowing what they were.

The new doctor did not go through the usual formula of pulse and tongue, nor did he ask the old established questions, but he seated himself quietly by Constance Sinclair's sofa and began to talk to her in a low voice, while Dr. Webb and Lord Clanyarde withdrew to the other end of the room, where Gilbert was standing by a table, absently turning over the leaves of a book.

'You have had a great sorrow, my dear lady,' said the German doctor, in that low and confidential tone which sometimes finds its way to the clouded brain when a louder utterance conveys no meaning.

'You have had a great sorrow, and have given

way to grief, as if there were no comfort either in earth or in heaven.'

Constance listened with lowered eyelids, but a look of attention came into her face presently, which the doctor perceived.

'Dear lady, there is always comfort in heaven—there is sometimes consolation on earth. Why can you not hope for some sudden, unlooked-for happiness, some great joy such as God has sometimes given to mourners like you? Your child was drowned, you think. What if you were deceived when you believed in her death? What if she was saved from the river? I do not say that it is so, but you cannot be certain. Who can know for a certainty that the little one was really drowned?'

The eyes were wide open now, staring at him wildly.

'What's the old fellow about so long?' asked Gilbert, impatiently.

'He is talking to her about her child,' replied Lord Clanyarde. 'He wants to make her cry if he can. He's a great psychologist.'

'Does that mean a great humbug?' asked Gilbert. 'It sounds like it.'

'Hope and comfort are coming to you, dear Mrs. Sinclair,' said the German doctor, 'be sure of that.'

Again Constance looked at him curiously; but at sight of the smoke-coloured spectacles and the sallow old face, half covered with white hair, she turned away her eyes with a sigh. If she could have seen eyes that looked honestly into hers, it might have given force to that promise of comfort, but this blind oracle was too mysterious. She gave a long sigh, and answered nothing.

The doctor looked at the open piano on the other side of the fireplace, and remained in thoughtful silence for a few moments.

'Does your mistress sing sometimes?' he asked Martha Briggs, who sat on guard by the sofa.

'No, sir, not since she's been so ill, but she plays sometimes, by snatches, beautiful. It would go to your heart to hear her.'

'Will you sing to me?' asked the doctor, 'if you are strong enough to go to the piano. Pray, try to sing.'

Constance looked at him with the same puzzled gaze, and then tried to rise. Martha supported her on one side, the doctor on the other, as she feebly tottered to the piano.

'I'll sing if you like,' she said, in a careless tone that told how far the mind was from consciousness of the present. 'Papa likes to hear me sing.'

She seated herself at the piano, and her fingers wandered slowly over the keys—and wandered on in a dreamy prelude that had little meaning. The German doctor listened patiently for a few minutes to this tangle of arpeggios, and then bending over the piano, played the few notes of a familiar symphony.

Constance gave a faint cry of surprise, and then she struck a chord—the chord that closed the symphony, and began, 'Strangers yet,' in a voice that had a strange hysterical power which was in curious contrast with the feebleness of the singer.

She sang on till she came to the words, 'Child and parent.' These touched a sensitive chord. She rose suddenly from the piano and burst into tears.

'That may do good,' said Dr. Webb, approvingly.

'My friend is no fool,' replied Lord Clanyarde.

'Take your mistress to her room,' said Gilbert to Martha, with an angry look. 'This is only playing upon her nerves. I wonder you can allow such folly, Lord Clanyarde.'

'Your own doctors have agreed that some shock was necessary, something to awaken her from apathy. Poor pet, those tears are a relief,' answered the father.

He went to his daughter and assisted in arranging the pillows as she lay down on the sofa. Martha calmly ignored her master's order.

The German doctor bent over Mrs. Sinclair for a moment, and whispered the one word 'Hope,' and then retired with the three other gentlemen.

'Would you like to prescribe anything?' asked Dr. Webb, taking the stranger into a little room off the hall.

'No, it is a case in which drugs are useless. Hope is the only remedy for Mrs. Sinclair's disease. She must be beguiled with hope, even if it be delusive.'

'What?' cried Dr. Webb, 'would you trifle with

her feelings?—play upon the weakness of her mind, and let her awaken by-and-by to find herself deluded?'

'I would do anything to snatch her from the jaws of death,' answered the German doctor, unhesitatingly. 'If hope is not held out to her, she will die. You see her fading day by day. Do you think there is any charm in your medicines that will bring her back to life?'

'I fear not, sir,' answered Dr. Webb, despondently.

'Then you, or those who love her, must find some more potent influence. She is heart-broken for the loss of her child. She must be taught to think that her child is still living.'

'But when her mind grows stronger it would be a still heavier blow to discover that she had been deceived.'

'She would be better able to bear the blow when health and strength had returned; and she might have formed an attachment in the meantime which would console her in the hour of disillusion.'

'I don't understand,' faltered Dr. Webb.

'I'll make myself clearer. A child must be brought to Mrs. Sinclair, a little girl of about the age of her own baby, and she must be persuaded to believe, now while her brain is clouded, that her own child is given back to her.'

'A cruel deception,' cried Dr. Webb.

'No; only a desperate remedy. Which are her friends to do, deceive her, or let her die? In her present condition of mind she will ask no questions, she will not speculate upon probabilities. She will take the child to her breast as a gift from heaven. A mind distraught is always ready to believe in the marvellous, to imagine itself the object of supernatural intervention.'

Dr. Webb looked thoughtful and half convinced. This German physician, who spoke very good English, by the way, seemed to have studied his subject deeply. Dr. Webb was no psychologist; but he had seen in the mentally afflicted that very love of the marvellous which Dr. Hollendorf spoke about. And what hope had he of saving his patient? Alas! none. It would be a cruel thing to put a spurious child in her arms—to trifle with a

mother's sacred feelings; but if life and reason could be saved by this means, and no other, surely the fraud would be a pious one.

'Mr. Sinclair would never consent,' said Dr. Webb.

'Mr. Sinclair must be made to consent. I have already suggested this step to Lord Clanyarde, and he approves the idea. He must bring his influence to bear upon Mr. Sinclair, who appears an indifferent husband, and not warmly interested in his wife's fate.'

'There you wrong him,' cried the faithful Webb. 'His manner does not do him justice. The poor man has been in a most miserable condition ever since Mrs. Sinclair's illness assumed an alarming aspect. Will you make this suggestion to him—propose our introducing a strange child?'

'I would rather the proposal should come from Lord Clanyarde,' answered the strange doctor, looking at his watch. 'I must get back to London by the next train. I shall tell Lord Clanyarde my opinion as he drives me to the station. I think I have made my ideas sufficiently clear to you, Dr. Webb?'

'Quite so, quite so,' cried the little man, whose mother was an Aberdeen woman. 'It is a most extraordinary thing, Dr. Hollendorf, that although I have never had the honour of meeting you before, your voice is very familiar to me.'

'My dear sir, do you suppose that nature can give a distinctive voice to every unit in an overcrowded world? You might hear my voice in the Fijis to-morrow. There would be nothing extraordinary in that.'

'Quite so. An accidental resemblance,' assented Dr. Webb.

The German would take no fee; he had come as Lord Clanyarde's friend, and he drove away in Lord Clanyarde's brougham, without any further loss of time.

Gilbert Sinclair and his solicitor devoted the rest of the evening to billiards, with frequent refreshment on Gilbert's part in the way of brandy and soda.

'You talked the other day about finding a purchaser for this confounded old barrack,' said Mr. Sinclair. 'I hate the place more every day, and it is

costing me no end of money for repairs ; never saw such a rickety old hole—always some wall tumbling down, or drain getting choked up—to say nothing of keeping up a large stable here as well as at Newmarket.'

'Why not give up Newmarket?' suggested Mr. Wyatt, with his common-sense air.

'I am not such a fool. Newmarket gives me some pleasure, and this place gives me none.'

'You must keep up a home for Mrs. Sinclair; and a London house would hardly be suitable in her present state.'

'I can take her to Hastings, or Ventnor, or to my box at Newmarket, if it comes to that.'

'Isn't it better for her to be near her father?'

'What does she want with her father, an old twaddler like Clanyarde, without a thought beyond the gossip of his club? Don't humbug, Wyatt. You told me you could put your finger on a purchaser. Was that bosh, or did you mean it?'

'It was not bosh,' answered Wyatt, 'but I wanted to be quite sure you were in earnest before I pushed my proposal any further. You might consider it

an impertinence even for me to think of such a thing.'

'What are you driving at?'

'Will you sell Davenant to me?'

Gilbert dropped his billiard cue, and stood staring at his friend in blank amazement. Here was a new state of things indeed. The professional man treading on the heels of the millionaire.

'You!' he exclaimed, with contemptuous surprise. 'I did not think fifteen per cent. and renewals could be made so profitable.'

'I am too thick-skinned to resent the insinuation,' said James Wyatt, cushioning his opponent's ball. 'I can afford to buy Davenant at the price you gave for it. I've got just enough money disengaged—I sold out of Palermos the other day when they were up—to provide the purchase-money. I brought down a deed of transfer, and if you are in earnest we can settle the business to-morrow morning.'

'You're buying the place as a speculation?' said Gilbert, suspiciously.

'Not exactly. But what would it matter to you

if I were ? You want to get rid of the place. I am ready to take it off your hands.'

'You have heard of a bid from somebody else?'

'No, I have not.'

'Well, you're a curious fellow! Going to get married, I suppose, and turn country squire?'

'Never mind my plans. Do you mean to sell?'

'Yes.'

'Then I am ready to buy.'

The deed was executed next morning. Gilbert stipulated that he was not to surrender the house till the Midsummer quarter, and that James Wyatt was to take the furniture and give him something handsome for his improvements.

Mr. Sinclair was much pleased at the idea of getting back five-and-thirty thousand pounds of ready money for a place the purchase of which had been a whim, and of the occupation whereof he was heartily tired. Those miners in the north were still holding out, and money had not been flowing into his coffers nearly so fast as it had been flowing out during the last half-year. He had made unlucky bargains in horse-flesh—squandered his money on

second-rate stock—and on running small races that were not worth his people's travelling expenses. In a word, he had done all those foolish things which an idle man who thinks himself extremely clever, and yet lends an ear to every new adviser, is apt to do.

'Five-and-thirty thou' will put me into smooth water,' he said, as he signed the contract with a flourish.

The one suspicion as to Mr. Wyatt's intentions, which would have prevented Gilbert Sinclair agreeing to the bargain, had never presented itself to his mind.

James Wyatt went back to London that afternoon, promising to meet his client next day at the Argyle Street branch of the Union Bank, and hand over the purchase-money. At eight o'clock that evening he presented himself at Sir Cyprian Davenant's chambers. He found Cyprian sitting alone among his books, smoking an Indian hookah.

'Wyatt, old fellow, this is a surprise,' said Cyprian, as they shook hands. 'Have you dined?'

'Thanks, yes, I took a chop at the Garrick. I've just come from Davenant.'

'Indeed! How is Mrs. Sinclair?'

'Pretty much the same, poor soul. How long is it since you heard of her?'

'I saw Lord Clanyarde at his club about a week ago.'

'Well, there's been no change lately. Something wrong with the mind, you see, and a gradual ebbing away of strength. She's not long for this world, I'm afraid; but she was too good for it. Angels are better off in heaven than they are with us. We don't appreciate them.'

'No more than swine appreciate pearls,' said Sir Cyprian.

'What would you give to get Davenant back?' asked Mr. Wyatt, without preface.

'What would I give? Anything—half my fortune.'

'What is your fortune worth?'

'About a hundred and fifty thousand.'

'Well, then, I shan't want so much as half of it, though your offer is tempting. Davenant is mine.'

'Yours!'

'Yes, at the price you got for it, with another five thousand as a sporting bid for the furniture and improvements. Give me five-and-twenty per cent. on my purchase, and Davenant is yours.'

'Willingly. But how about Mrs. Sinclair? Will it not grieve her to lose the place?'

'Whether or no, the place is sold. I tell you, Sir Cyprian, I stand before you the owner of Davenant and all its appurtenances. I did not buy it for myself, but on the speculation that, as I bought it cheap, you would be glad to give me a profit on my purchase. I knew Sinclair well enough to be very sure that he would let the roof rot over his head before he would consent to sell the place to you.'

'You have done a friendly thing, Wyatt, and I thank you. I should hesitate, perhaps, in agreeing to such a bargain were any other man than Mr. Sinclair in question, but I do not feel myself bound to stand upon punctilio with him.'

'Punctilio, man! There's no punctilio to stand upon. Sinclair sold the estate to me unconditionally, and I have an indisputable right to sell it to you.'

CHAPTER XXI.

A RAPID THAW.

Sir Cyprian Davenant had ridden to Totteridge several times after his discovery of Mrs. Walsingham's connection with the village, as tenant of that small and unpretending house with the green shutters, glass door, and square plot of garden. It was his habit to put up his horse at the inn, and go for a rustic stroll while the animal rested after his mid-day feed, and in these rambles he had made the acquaintance of the nurse and baby at the green-shuttered house.

The nurse was a German girl, fat-faced, good-natured, and unintelligent. Sir Cyprian won her heart at the outset by addressing her in her native language, which she had not heard since she came to England, and in the confidence inspired by his kind manners and excellent German she freely imparted her affairs to the stranger. Mrs. Walsing-

ham had hired her in Brussels, and brought her home as nurse to the little girl, whose previous nurse had been dismissed for bad conduct in that city.

'Mrs. Walsingham's little girl?' inquired Sir Cyprian.

'No. The darling is an orphan, the daughter of a poor cousin of Mrs. Walsingham, who died in Vienna, and the kind lady brought the little one home, and is going to bring her up as her own child.'

Sir Cyprian heard and was doubtful. He had his own theory about this baby, but a theory which he would not for worlds have imparted to any one. He got on quite familiar terms with the little one by-and-by. She was a chubby rosy infant of about fifteen months old, with brown eyes and fair complexion, and hair that made golden-brown rings upon her ivory forehead. She made frantic efforts to talk, but at present only succeeded in being loquacious in a language of her own.

She was quite ready to attach herself to the wandering stranger, fascinated by his watch-chain and seals.

'What is her name?' asked Sir Cyprian.

'Clara, but we always call her Baby.'

'Clara? That's only her Christian name; she has a surname, I suppose?'

The nursemaid supposed as much also, but had never heard any surname, nor the profession of the little dear's father, nor any details of the death of father and mother. Mrs. Walsingham was a lady who talked very little, but she seemed extremely fond of baby. She came to see her twice a week, and sometimes stayed all day, playing with her, and superintending her dinner, and carrying her about the garden.

On the morning after that interview with James Wyatt, Sir Cyprian rode to Totteridge and put up his horse, as usual, at the little inn. The nurse had told him that Mrs. Walsingham was to be at the cottage to-day, and he had special reasons for wishing to see that lady. He might have called upon her in Half-moon Street, of course, but he preferred to see her at Baby's establishment, if possible.

It was noon when he walked up and down the pathway before the cottage, waiting for Mrs.

Walsingham's arrival, a bright winter day, with a blue sky and a west wind. He had exchanged greetings with Baby already, that young lady saluting him from the nursery window with vivacious flourishes of her pink arms.

The church clock had not long struck twelve when Mrs. Walsingham's neat brougham drove up. She opened the door and let herself out, and had scarcely stepped on to the pathway, when she recognised Sir Cyprian.

She turned very pale, and made a little movement, as if she would have gone back to her carriage, but Sir Cyprian advanced, hat in hand, to greet her.

'You have not forgotten me, I hope, Mrs. Walsingham?'

'Sir Cyprian Davenant, I think?'

'Yes. I had the pleasure of meeting you more than three years ago at the "Star and Garter."'

'I remember perfectly. You have been in Africa since then. I have read some notices of your adventures there. I am glad to see you so little the worse for your travels. And now I must bid you good morning. I have to see some people

here. You can wait at the inn, Holmes," to the coachman.

'Will you give me half an hour—a quarter of an hour's conversation, Mrs. Walsingham?' asked Sir Cyprian.

She looked at him uneasily, evidently puzzled.

'Upon what subject?'

'Upon a matter of life and death.'

'You alarm me. Have you come here on purpose to waylay me? I thought our meeting was accidental?'

'Waylay is a disagreeable word; but I certainly came here this morning on purpose to see you. I am going to make an appeal to your heart, Mrs. Walsingham. I want you to do a noble action.'

'I am afraid you have come to the wrong quarter for that commodity,' she answered, with a bitter smile; but she seemed somewhat reassured by this mode of address.

'Shall we walk?' she asked, moving away from the garden gate.

The wide high road lay before them, destitute

of any sign of human life, the leafless limes and chestnuts standing up against the winter sky, the far-off hills purple in the clear bright air. They would be as much alone here as within any four walls, and Mrs. Walsingham was evidently disinclined to admit Sir Cyprian into Ivy Cottage, as the house with the green shutters was called.

'Have you friends here? Do you often come?' asked Mrs. Walsingham, carelessly.

'I take my morning ride here occasionally, and the other day, while resting my horse, I made the acquaintance of your German nurse and her charge. Baby is a most fascinating little thing, and I take the warmest interest in her.'

'What a pity my small cousin is not old enough to appreciate the honour!' sneered Mrs. Walsingham.

Sir Cyprian ignored the sneer.

'My interest in that sweet little thing has given rise to a strange idea—a wild one, you will say, perhaps, when I have explained myself. But I must begin at the beginning.

I told you that I was going to make an appeal to your heart. I come here to ask you to lend your aid in saving the life and reason of one whom you may have deemed in somewise your rival. Mrs. Sinclair is dying.'

Mrs. Walsingham was silent.

'You have heard as much from some one else, perhaps?'

'I heard that she was seriously ill.'

'And mentally afflicted?'

'Yes. You do not expect me to be greatly shocked or grieved, I hope? I never saw the lady, except in her box at the opera.'

'And being a stranger you cannot pity her. That is not following the example of the good Samaritan.'

'If I found her on the roadside I should try to succour her, I dare say,' answered Mrs. Walsingham; 'but as her distresses do not come in my pathway, and as I have many nearer demands upon my pity, I can hardly be expected to make myself miserable on Mrs. Sinclair's account. No doubt she has plenty of sympathy—a husband who

adores her—and the chivalrous devotion of old admirers, like yourself.'

'Spare her your sneers, Mrs. Walsingham. At no moment of her married life has she been a woman to be envied. In her present condition to refuse her pity would be to be less than human. Constance Sinclair is dying of a broken heart.'

'Very sad,' sighed Mrs. Walsingham.

'That is what you would say if one of your friends related the untimely death of a favourite lapdog. Have you ever thought what that phrase means, Mrs. Walsingham? People use it lightly enough. A broken heart—the slow agony of a grief that kills;—a broken heart—not broken by some sudden blow that shatters joy and life together;—happy those whom sorrow slays with such merciful violence,—but the slow wearing away, the dull, hopeless days, the sleepless nights, the despair that eats into the soul, yet is so slow to kill;—these are the agonies which we sum up lightly, in our conventional phraseology, when we talk about broken hearts.'

'Is it the loss of her baby which Mrs. Sinclair feels so deeply?' asked Mrs. Walsingham, who had

listened thoughtfully to Sir Cyprian's appeal. She no longer affected a callous indifference to her rival's grief.

'Yes. That is the grief which is killing her. She has never been really happy with her husband, though she has been a good and dutiful wife. The child brought her happiness. She gave it all her love. She may have erred, perhaps, in concentrating her affection upon this baby, but the baby represented her world of love. When that was taken from her—suddenly, without a moment's warning—she gave herself up to despair. I have talked to a faithful servant who was with her in that bitter time, who knew her measureless love for the child. I have seen her in her grief, seen her the wreck of the joyous girl I knew three years ago.'

Mrs. Walsingham was moved. No softening tear veiled the hard brightness of her eyes, but her lower lip worked nervously, and her increasing pallor told of a mind deeply troubled.

'If her husband had by any act of his brought her to this condition, I should call him something worse than a murderer,' said Sir Cyprian, 'but,

badly as I think of Gilbert Sinclair, I cannot blame him here. It is destiny that has been cruel—an inscrutable Providence which has chosen to inflict this hopeless misery on the gentlest and most innocent of victims. It is very hard to understand why this should be.'

'Mrs. Sinclair is not the first,' said Mrs. Walsingham, struggling against some strong feeling. 'Other women have lost children they loved—only children—the idols of their hearts.'

'Other women have had kinder husbands, perhaps, to sympathize with and comfort them. Other women have had sources of consolation which Mrs. Sinclair has not.'

'She has her piety—her church—her prayer-book. I should have thought so pure and perfect a woman would find consolation from those. I do not profess to be religious—or to have treasures laid up in heaven—and the loss of what I love most on earth might bring *me* to madness. But Mrs. Sinclair's placid perfection should be above such human weakness.'

'She is human enough and weak enough to

break her heart for the loss of her child,' answered Sir Cyprian, growing angry. 'But you seem to be incapable of pity, and I fear I have been mistaken in appealing to you. Yet I thought that your love for that child yonder might inspire some feeling of sympathy with an afflicted mother.'

'My affection for my poor little orphan cousin—a waif thrown on my hands by misfortune—is not a very absorbing sentiment,' answered Mrs. Walsingham, with languid scorn.

'So much the better,' cried Sir Cyprian, eagerly, 'for in that case you will the easier fall in with my plan for saving Mrs. Sinclair's life and reason.'

'You have a plan for saving her?'

'Yes, a plan recommended by her physicians, and to which her husband and father have given their consent. In a crisis in which nothing but hope could save her she has been told to hope. It has been even hinted to her that her child is still living.'

Mrs. Walsingham started, and looked at him wonderingly.

'A cruel deception, you think; but the case was desperate, remember. This false hope has already done something. I have heard this morning that there has been a faint rally—a flicker of returning intelligence. She remembers that she has been told to hope—remembers and looks forward to the realization of the promise that has been made. If we fail her now, despair will again take possession of her—more bitter because of this ray of light. The plan formed by those who love her best is to give her a child to love; a child whom she will believe at first to be her own, saved from the German river; but about which, in time to come, when reason and strength have returned, she may be told the truth. She will have given the little one her love by that time, and the adopted child will fill the place of the lost one.'

'A most romantic scheme, assuredly, Sir Cyprian. And pray what part do you expect me to play in this domestic drama? Why choose me for your confidante?'

'The little girl you have adopted is about the age of Mrs. Sinclair's baby. You admit that she

is not very dear to you—a charge which you have taken upon yourself out of charity. Let Gilbert Sinclair adopt that child. He shall provide handsomely for her future, or, if you prefer trusting me, I will settle a sum of money which you shall approve, in trust for your little cousin, you yourself choosing the trustees. Give me that dear child, Mrs. Walsingham, and you will be the means of saving Constance Sinclair's life.'

'That child?' cried Mrs. Walsingham, looking at him with wide open eyes. 'I give you *that* child —to be Constance Sinclair's solace and consolation —to win Gilbert's wife back to life and happiness? *I* surrender that child! You must be mad to ask it.'

'Did you not tell me just now that the child was not especially dear to you?'

'She is dear to me,' answered Mrs. Walsingham, vehemently. 'I have grown to love her. She is all I have in the world to love. She reminds me of one who once loved me. Why do you prate to me of Mrs. Sinclair's loneliness? She cannot be lonelier than I am. What is there but emptiness

in my heart? Yet I do not complain of a broken heart. *I* do not abandon myself to madness or imbecility. I bear my burden. Let her bear hers. Give you that child, indeed! That is asking too much.'

'Pardon me, Mrs. Walsingham. I thought I was talking to a woman with a noble nature, whose higher instincts only needed to be appealed to.'

'It is so long since people have left off appealing to my higher instincts that they have somewhat lost their use. Do you think, Sir Cyprian Davenant, that I have cause to love or pity, or sacrifice myself for Constance Sinclair? You should know better than that, unless you have lived all these years in this world without knowing what kind of clay your fellow-men and women are made of. I have the strongest reason to detest Mrs. Sinclair, and I do detest her, frankly. She has done me no wrong, you will say. She has done me the greatest wrong —robbed me of the man I love, of wealth, status, name, and place in the world. Do you think it matters to me that she was unconscious of that wrong? She has done it, and I hate her for it, and shall so hate her till my dying day.'

'Your hatred will not reach her in her grave or follow her beyond it,' answered Sir Cyprian. 'Your pity might save her life.'

'Find some hospital brat to palm upon this distracted mother—some baby-farmer's *protegée*.'

'I will find some respectably born child, be sure, Mrs. Walsingham. It was only a fancy, perhaps, which led me to propose taking your little kinswoman. I counted too much upon the generosity of a disappointed rival.'

And with this home-thrust Sir Cyprian bowed, and walked away, leaving the lady to her own reflections.

A woman of this kind, a being swayed by passion, is often a mass of inconsistency and contradiction, now hot, now cold. At a late hour that evening Sir Cyprian received a letter, delivered by a man-servant. It was from Mrs. Walsingham.

'I am the most wretched of women,' she wrote, 'utterly weary of life. Mrs. Sinclair may have the child. She would grow up a wretch if she grew up under my influence, for every day makes me more miserable and more bitter. What shall I be as an

old woman? Send some trustworthy person to fetch the little girl to-morrow. I give her up to you entirely, but upon condition that Mrs. Sinclair shall never know to whom she owes her adopted child. May the adoption prosper; but as I hear that Mr. Sinclair is in a fair way to ruin, I do not think you are giving my young kinswoman a very brilliant start in life. Be this as it may, I wash my hands of her. She has not brought me happiness; and perhaps if I were to let her wind herself round my heart it might prove by-and-by that I had taught a serpent to coil there. I have not too good an opinion of her blood.—Your's truly,

'CLARA WALSINGHAM.

'Half-moon Street,

'Wednesday night.'

CHAPTER XXII.

KILL OR CURE.

Mr. Sinclair was told by Lord Clanyarde of the plan which had been devised by the German physician for his daughter's cure, and after a lengthy discussion gave his sullen consent to the imposture.

'I don't like your German doctor—a thorough-paced charlatan, I'll warrant,' he said, 'and I don't like palming off an impostor upon my poor wife. But if you see any chance of good from this experiment let it be tried. God knows I would give my heart's blood to bring Constance back to health and reason.'

This was said with an unmistakable earnestness, and Lord Clanyarde believed it. He did not know what bitter reason Gilbert Sinclair had for desiring his wife's recovery, in the guilty consciousness that his brutality was the chief cause of her illness.

'You are not going to bring some low-born brat into my house, I hope?' said Gilbert, with the pride of a man whose grandfather had worked in the mines, and whose father had died worth a million.

'No, we shall find a gentleman's child—some orphan of about Christabel's age—to adopt.'

Gilbert shrugged his shoulders, and said no more.

That visit of the German physician had certainly wrought a change in Constance Sinclair's condition, and Dr. Webb declared that the change was for the better. She seemed to have awakened from that dull apathy, that utter inertness of mind and body, which both the London physician and the faithful country watch-dog had taken to be the precursor of death. She was restless—fluttered by some expectation which kept her senses curiously on the alert—wistful — watchful — listening — starting at every opening of a door—at every coming footfall.

On the morning after Dr. Hollendorf's visit, she asked for her Bible, and began to read David's Psalms of thanksgiving and rejoicing aloud, like one who

gave thanks for a great joy. Later in the same day she went to the piano and sang—sang as she had never done since the beginning of her illness—sang like one who pours forth the gladness of her heart in melody.

When Dr. Webb came that afternoon, he found his patient sitting in an arm-chair by the window, propped up with pillows, much to the disgust of Melanie Duport, who was on duty at this time.

'I know she isn't strong enough to sit up,' said Melanie to the doctor, 'but she would do it. She seems to be watching for something, or some one.'

The long window opening upon the balcony commanded a distant curve of the drive leading up to the house, and it was on this point that Constance Sinclair's eyes were fixed.

'What are you watching for, dear lady?' asked Dr. Webb, in his bland voice, that caressing tone in which medical men address feminine and infantine patients. In Dr. Webb's case the blandness meant more than it usually does, for he really loved his patient.

'I am watching for my child. They will bring her to-day, perhaps. The strange doctor told me she was not drowned. It was true, wasn't it? He wouldn't deceive me. There was something in his voice that made me trust him—something that went to my heart. My darling was saved, and she is coming back to me. You won't deceive me, I know. She is coming—soon—soon—soon! Dear, dearest Dr. Webb, is it true?'

'Dear Mrs. Sinclair, you must not agitate yourself in this way,' cried the doctor, flattered by this address. 'Yes, yes, Lord Clanyarde is going to bring you the little girl; and you'll be very fond of her, I hope—and feel quite happy again.'

'Happy?' cried Constance, 'I shall be in heaven! Ask papa to bring her soon.'

She was restless throughout that day—sleepless all night. Sometimes her mind wandered, but at other times she spoke clearly and reasonably of God's goodness to her in saving her child. On the following day the same idea was still paramount, but she was somewhat weakened by her excitement and restlessness, and was no longer able to sit up at her post of

observation by the window. As the day wore on the old dull apathy seemed to be creeping over her again. She lay on her couch by the fire, silent, exhausted, noticing nothing that occurred around her; her pulse was alarmingly weak, her eyes vacant and heavy.

'If they don't bring the child soon, it will be too late for their experiment,' thought Dr. Webb. 'And if they do bring it, the excitement may be fatal. God guide us aright!'

It was dusk when Lord Clanyarde's brougham drove up to the porch, and his lordship alighted, carrying a child, muffled in soft woollen shawls, and fast asleep. Gilbert Sinclair had not yet returned from his daily ride. The house was dark and empty.

Lord Clanyarde went straight to his daughter's room, where Dr. Webb was sitting, too anxious to leave his patient till the crisis which the intended experiment might produce had passed safely. Dr. Webb was not particularly hopeful about the strange doctor's plan.

'Such good news, my darling!' said Lord Clan-

yarde, with elaborate cheerfulness. 'Pray don't agitate yourself, my dear Constance.'

She had started up from her sofa already, and tottered towards him with outstretched arms.

'I have brought you your baby. The little pet was not drowned after all, and some good people in Germany took care of her. You will find her changed, of course; three or four months makes such a difference in a baby.'

Constance neither heeded nor heard. She was sitting on the floor with the newly awakened child in her lap, hugging it to her breast, weeping sweetest tears over the soft curly head, breathing forth her rapture in low inarticulate exclamations. The firelight shone on the picture of mother and child clinging together thus—the little one submitting uncomplainingly to those vehement caresses.

'Thank God!' ejaculated Lord Clanyarde within himself. 'She doesn't ask a question, poor child. She hasn't the faintest suspicion that we're deceiving her.'

He had chosen this hour for the introduction of the infant impostor, so that Constance's first

scrutiny of the baby features should take place in a doubtful light. If first impressions were but favourable, doubts could hardly arise afterwards in that enfeebled mind. Only when reason was fully restored would Constance begin to ask awkward questions.

In this happy hour she did not even scrutinize the baby face—she only covered it with tears and kisses, and laid it against her bosom, and was content. She accepted this baby stranger at once as her lost Christabel.

Dr. Webb was delighted. Those tears, those caresses, those gushes of happy love! What medicines could work such cure for a mind astray?

'Upon my word, I believe you have done the right thing, and that your German doctor is not such a quack as I thought him,' whispered the little man to Lord Clanyarde.

He had still better reason to say this three or four hours later, when Constance was sleeping tranquilly—a sound and healthy slumber such as she had not known for many weary weeks—with the baby nestling at her side.

Mr. Sinclair heard of the success that had attended the experiment, and seemed glad; or as glad as a man could be who had pressing cause for trouble.

END OF VOL. I.

J. AND W. RIDER, PRINTERS, LONDON

WEAVERS AND WEFT

And other Tales.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET'

ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

LONDON
JOHN MAXWELL AND CO.
4, SHOE LANE, FLEET STREET
1877
[*All rights reserved.*]

CONTENTS TO VOL. II.

WEAVERS AND WEFT, *continued:*

CHAP. PAGE

I. 'EXCELLENT BASILISK! TURN UPON THE VULTURE 1

II. GILBERT ASKS A QUESTION 28

III. READY FOR THE WORST 40

IV. CAUGHT IN THE TOILS 52

V. CROWNER'S QUEST 69

VI. CRUEL KINDNESS 82

VII. AFTER MANY DAYS 99

IN GREAT WATERS 127

SEBASTIAN

I. A FINE GENTLEMAN 181

II. AT HIS GATES 191

III. THE MIDSUMMER RENTS 200

IV. BENONI'S DOOM 213

LEVISON'S VICTIM 228

CHRISTMAS IN POSSESSION 262

JOHN GRANGER

I. A GHOST STORY 308

WEAVERS AND WEFT.

CHAPTER I.

'EXCELLENT BASILISK! TURN UPON THE VULTURE.'

If Fortune in a general way is a capricious and uncertain divinity, assuredly that particular goddess who presides over the affairs of racing men is most given to tricks and starts, to sudden frowns and unexpected smiles.

Gilbert Sinclair's new stables had, up to the beginning of this present year, brought him nothing but ill-luck. So unvarying had been his reverses that his trainer and grooms gave full scope to their superstition, and opined that the stables were unlucky, and that no good would ever come out of

them. 'There had been a murder committed, may be, somewheres about,' suggested one man, 'or the ground had been wrongfully come by—who could tell?'

With the Craven meeting, however, the tide turned, and the Sinclair stables scored three palpable hits. But this was not all. A colt which Mr. Sinclair had bought at York two years before, with all his faults and all his engagements—the engagements being particularly heavy, and the faults including one which the veterinary authorities believed might be fatal to the animal's career as a racer. The colt was of renowned lineage on both sides, and boasted a genealogy that bristled with famous names—a colt in whose future some magnate of the turf would doubtless have speculated two or three thousand, but for that unlucky splint in the off fore leg.

Gilbert Sinclair bought the colt for two hundred and fifty guineas, under the advice of his trainer, a shrewd Yorkshireman, who loved a bargain better than the best purchase made in a regular way.

'He's got the Touchstone and the Spectre blood

in him,' said Mr. Jackson, the trainer. 'He's bound to come out a flyer, if we can get rid of the splint in that off fore leg.'

'But suppose we don't, Jackson?' said Gilbert, doubtfully. 'Two hundred and fifty's a lot of money for a lame horse, and his engagements will come to a good bit more.'

'You may as well lose your money on him as on anything else, mayn't you?' argued Mr. Jackson, who had no exalted opinion of his employer's judgment, and did not trouble himself to pretend a greater respect than he felt. The best of men is but small in the eyes of his trainer. 'You let me have that there colt to nuss, and say no more about it. It 'll be a fad for me. I ought to have my fancy sometimes. You have yours, and a fat lot comes of it.'

Thus urged, Gilbert bought the colt, and John Jackson took him under his wing, and made him his pet and darling, shutting him up in impenetrable loose boxes, and exercising him secretly at unearthly hours of the morning, in sequestered paddocks far from the eyes of touts. Mr. Jackson had children—infants who climbed his knees and called him 'father'

in childhood's lisping syllables, but there was a pride in John Jackson's eye and a tenderness in his voice when he spoke of Goblin, the bay colt, which his own flesh and blood had never been able to evoke.

'I want to win the Derby before I die,' he said, with a touch of sentiment, like Moses sighing for the land of Canaan. 'It isn't much to ask for, after having done my duty by a blessed lot of screws.'

Nobody—not even Mr. Sinclair himself—could ever penetrate the veil of mystery with which Jackson surrounded his favourite. Whether Goblin was doing well or ill was a secret which Jackson kept locked within his own breast. When Jackson looked gloomy, the underlings of the stable concluded that Goblin was 'off his feed,' or that Goblin was 'up to nought.'

When it came to a trial, Mr. Jackson shrank from the contest; and when compelled to run his *protégé* against the best horse in the stable, secretly weighted Goblin in such a manner as to insure his being ignominiously beaten.

Goblin kept none of his two-year-old engagements, though Mr. Jackson went so far as to admit

by this time that the colt was no more lame than he was. 'But I ain't going to let him fritter away his strength in two-year old races,' said Mr. Jackson, decisively. 'I ain't forgot Bonnie Dundee.'

Gilbert Sinclair submitted unwillingly, being at this time very low down in his luck as a racing man, and anxious for any success which might in somewise redeem his position.

Now came spring—violets and primroses; woodlands white with chestnut bloom and hawthorn; nightingales warbling their vesper love-songs, and—much more important to gentlemen of Mr. Sinclair's class—the Two Thousand Guineas. And now Goblin came forward to perform his first important engagement as a three-year old, and Gilbert Sincalir was richly rewarded for his patience.

Goblin—a horse entirely unknown to the racing public—came in an easy winner; and Gilbert, who had taken his trainer's advice, and had backed his horse to the utmost of his capacity, won a small fortune, as well as feeling pretty sure about his expectations for the Derby.

It was the first great success Gilbert Sinclair had

ever scored upon the turf, and he left Newmarket that night almost light-headed with excitement. Things had been going much better with him since January. The men had gone back to their work in the grimy north. Indian steamers were using Mr. Sinclair's coal as fast as he could produce it. The golden tide was flowing into his exchequer again, and his banker's book no longer presented a dismal blank upon its left-hand pages. This success at Newmarket was the crowning mercy. He felt himself a rich man once more, and laughed to scorn the notion of surrendering Davenant at Midsummer. Wyatt had bought and paid for the estate, but of course would be glad to sell it again at a profit.

The scheme for Constance Sinclair's restoration had prospered wonderfully. Health and strength had returned, and with these the clear light of reason. She had never doubted the identity of the little girl Lord Clanyarde brought her that winter evening with the child she had lost.

She had readily accepted the story—a somewhat lame one—of the child's rescue by some kind German peasants, who had brought it over to England, where,

by a curious chain of circumstances, Lord Clanyarde had come to know of its existence. The little girl was known to the whole household as Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair's own child. There would be time enough by and by to reveal the imposture. Even Martha Briggs—little Christabel's devoted nurse—had never suspected the trick that had been played upon her mistress. The only member of the household who had shown any particular curiosity, or desire to know the ins and outs of this business, was Melanie Duport. That young woman had asked as many questions as she could venture to put, and had appeared somewhat mystified by the course of events.

So there had been peace at Davenant during the early spring. Constance had been quietly happy in the little girl's society, and in those joys which the convalescent feels when a world that has been darkened to the wandering mind reappears in all its light and beauty. Never had the woods and fields, the blue April sky and shining river, seemed so lovely in the eyes of Constance Sinclair as they appeared this year. Her love of music, of art, of all bright

things, seemed intensified by that awful season of darkness, in which these delights had been blotted from her mind.

Her husband was tolerably kind to her, but spent much of his time away from Davenant, and did not trouble her repose by filling the house with his rackety companions.

Mr. Wyatt came now and then for a day or two, but he was the only guest during this tranquil spring-time.

Thus stood matters early in May, when Goblin won the Two Thousand Guineas, and in the trainer's phraseology, brought his owner 'a pot of money.'

Gilbert went up to London an hour after the race, with his 'pot of money,' or, at any rate, some portion of it, in his pocket. The rest would be paid up at Tattersall's in due course. He had eaten nothing that day, having been too anxious about the result of the race to eat any breakfast, and too much elated by his triumph to eat any dinner. He had therefore been compelled to sustain nature upon brandy and soda, which is not exactly a sedative for a man of hot temper. He talked

about Goblin and his own cleverness in getting hold of Goblin all the way up to London, and arrived at Shoreditch with his pulse galloping and his blood at fever heat.

'I'm not going to let that quill-driving cad have Davenant now,' he said to himself. 'This race brings me in something like twenty thou', and I shall "pot" as much more over the Derby.'

He called a hansom, and told the man to drive to Bloomsbury Square, intending to honour Mr. Wyatt, otherwise 'that quill-driving cad,' with a call. The cab rattled through the City streets, all shining in the setting sun, which was fading redly on the westward-facing windows of the grave old square when Gilbert alighted at Mr. Wyatt's door.

It was a fine old house which the solicitor occupied, one of the oldest and largest in the square, and there had been no attempt to disfigure a house in which Steele and his companions may have hob-nobbed over the midnight bottle, with such modern improvements as stucco without and gas within.

A respectable-looking man-servant, out of livery,

admitted Mr. Sinclair into a square hall, oak-panelled and paved with black and white marble. The doors were oak, deeply set in the solid old walls, the architraves handsome enough for a modern palace. An old-fashioned oil lamp had just been lighted, and shed a sickly yellow light on some of the panels, while others reflected the crimson glow in the west, as if they had been splashed with blood.

'Your master at home?' asked Gilbert.

'Yes, sir. He has just dined. Shall I show you into the dining-room?'

'Yes, and you can bring me something to eat, Staples,' replied Gilbert, who was quite at home in his solicitor's house.

He went into the dining-room without giving the man time to announce him. James Wyatt sat in a lounging attitude facing the western sun, with a claret jug and an untouched dessert before him on the small oval table. That snug oval table of pollard oak had superseded the ponderous old mahogany twenty-two feet by six at which Mr. Wyatt's father and grandfather had been wont to entertain

their friends. James Wyatt wanted no twenty-two foot table, for he never gave large parties. Cosy quartettes, or even confidential tête-à-tête banquets were more to his liking, and he gave as elaborate and careful a dinner to a man who dined with him alone as other men provide for a gathering that includes all the magnates of their circle. Were pollard oak gifted with speech, that oval board could have told many a thrilling tale of thirty per cent. which had been made, in the initiative stage, to seem only seven: of clients in the City who had money to lend, and were so good-natured about lending it, on a safe mortgage or otherwise: and of that awful hour in which the same good easy-going clients assumed quite another character, and were determined to foreclose, or to get their money back by hook or by crook, with a savage disregard of the borrower's feelings. But happily for the maintenance of the decencies, modern oaks do not claim to be oracular. Mr. Wyatt's table was not loquacious; and the grave old room, with a few fine pictures on the oak panelling, and some valuable bronzes on the tall chimney-piece, looked respectable enough to

inspire confidence in the most cautious mind. If the pictures had been daubs, or the furniture gaudy, the effect would have been different. But the pictures looked like heirlooms, and the furniture told of a chastened taste, and a refinement that implied virtue and honour in the possessor thereof.

'Back already?' exclaimed Mr. Wyatt. 'How did Goblin go? Got a place?'

'Won in a canter,' answered Gilbert, flinging himself into a chair, and wiping his damp forehead. 'Never saw such a horse. There's nothing to beat him. I was right about him, you see.'

'Jackson was right about him, you mean. Have some dinner,' said Mr. Wyatt, ringing the bell.

'Thanks, I've ordered some. I don't stand upon punctilio with you, you see.'

'I should be very sorry if you did. Well, you've made a heap of money, I suppose?'

'Yes, it's a pretty good haul. Jackson raved like a lunatic about the horse. I was to put on every sixpence I had. I told the fellow I should be ruined

if Goblin lost. "He won't lose," raved Jackson, dancing about like a maniac. "You don't know what that hoss can do. I tried him last March against Lord Wildair's Cowcumber, and put a hextra seven pound on him, and Cowcumber was nowhere. I felt sorry I hadn't made it fourteen pound, when I saw that blessed Cowcumber regular pumped." I was bound to believe in the horse after that, wasn't I?'

'Yes, if you could believe in the trainer.'

'Well, the result has shown that he told me the truth. Oh, here comes the dinner.'

Gilbert made a weak attempt to eat some fish and a still weaker attempt at a plate of lamb, but failed in both efforts.

'I've no appetite,' he said. 'You'd better give me a brandy and soda.'

'How many brandies and sodas have you had to-day?" asked Wyatt, with an air of friendly anxiety, that tone of an easy-going mentor which long use had made natural to him.

If James Wyatt's clients went to the dogs, their ruin could never be laid at his door. He gave them

such good advice upon the way, and parted with them with a friendly shake hands at the last, just before the dogs eat them.

'Do you suppose I counted them?' demanded Gilbert, with a laugh. 'The sun was hot, and I was excited about Goblin. I had a pocket full of silver, and it's all gone, and I don't think I've paid for anything except brandy and soda. That's a rough way of calculating.'

'You've been drinking too much brandy, Gilbert.'

'That's my look out.'

'Try some of that claret.'

'I'll have brandy or nothing.'

Mr. Wyatt sighed, and rang the bell, and then filled a large cool-looking glass with the Lafitte, which he sipped in a calmly appreciative manner, with the air of a man who had never been thirsty in his life.

'Yes, Jim,' began Gilbert, harking back, 'I've made a tidy haul to-day, and I expect a bigger haul on Wednesday fortnight. And now, old fellow, I want you to do me a favour.'

'Find a good investment for your winnings?

With pleasure. I can get you a safe seven per cent.'

'Thanks, that's not the favour I mean. Ah, here's the stuff,' as the man brought in a spirit stand and a supply of soda water. 'I want you to let me have Davenant back, Jim,' pouring brandy into a tall tumbler without looking at the quantity. 'You can't want the place for yourself, you know?'

'Why not?'

'Well, my dear boy,' replied Mr. Sinclair, with the amiable candour which is sometimes induced by alcohol, 'you're not the sort of man to play the country gentleman. You wouldn't find it pay. You may stop, you may shut up the shop if you will, but the odour of sixty per cent. will hang round you still. You understand, old fellow. The county people wouldn't associate with you. They come to me, you know, for my wife's sake; that's a different thing. They wouldn't cotton to you. They're very fond of borrowing money, but they don't like money-lenders. You'd find county society a dead letter, dear boy; and it would be folly to keep up such a place as Davenant for the reception of a pack of young fools

from London. You can pluck such pigeons anywhere.'

"How kind of you to be so interested in my business.'

'Nothing like candour between friends,' said Gilbert.

'And you want me to sell you Davenant? That's curious. You were red hot to get rid of the place a few months ago.'

'I was down on my luck just then. Things have changed for the better. And I find that I care more for the place than I thought I did. And I shouldn't particularly like my neighbours to crow over me. It would look as if I were ruined if I parted with such a place as that.'

'What a complete change of tone! I suppose your wife's recovery has caused this alteration in your feelings?'

Gilbert winced. It always stung him when James Wyatt spoke of his wife. The man's tone implied some occult knowledge. Speak as courteously as he might, there was always a lurking sneer.

'Come, Jim, I'll give you a handsome profit on

your bargain. What more can you want? Name your own terms. I know you only bought the place as a speculation.'

'Suppose I did, and that the speculation has answered. How then?'

'You mean that you have sold it again?'

'Within four and twenty hours of my purchase.'

'By Jove, that's sharp work,' cried Gilbert, bitterly disappointed. 'But perhaps the man who bought it would take a profit on his purchase.'

'Not much chance of that. The man who bought it would have given me almost any money for the place, if I had been inclined to take advantage of his eagerness to get it back again.'

'Back again!' cried Gilbert, starting up with a vehemence that sent the soda water bottles spinning across the table. 'To get it back again! Then you've sold it to Sir Cyprian Davenant!'

'That's the man,' answered Wyatt, opening his cigar-case, and affecting an extreme deliberation in the choice of a cigar.

'Jim Wyatt, you're a scoundrel,' roared Sinclair.

'That's strong, and actionable into the bargain.

Don't be a fool, Sinclair. You want to turn your estate into money. I give you the money you want, and take my property to the best market. Where is the wrong?'

'Where is the wrong? You duped, you hoodwinked me. You know how I hate that man. You know that I would rather cut my throat than give him any advantage. You know, or you ought to know, that my chief motive in buying Davenant was to humiliate him, to give my wife the place he might have given her, to show her which was the better man of the two, to set my heel upon Sir Cyprian Davenant. And you swindle me out of my revenge, —you put the winning card into my enemy's hand. You, my professed friend, — you, who have made thousands out of me.'

'I grant the thousands,' answered Wyatt, looking up, and facing his accuser with a sparkle of defiance in his small gray eyes. 'People who want dirty work done must pay a good price for it. But as for friendship, please remember that I have never made any professions on that score. When have you ever treated *me* like a friend, Gilbert Sinclair, or like an

equal? When have you descended from the lofty standpoint of your coalpits and your smelting works to my level? Not once. And you think because you have made a social door-mat of me—because you have let me fetch and carry, and honoured me with your confidence when you wanted to air your grievances, or get out of a difficulty—because, in one word, I have been useful, you think I am to call you my friend, and sacrifice my own interests in order to gratify your spite. You wanted to get rid of Davenant; I took it off your hands, and made a profit by the transaction. You don't suppose I would speculate five and thirty thousand to oblige you.'

'Judas!' cried Gilbert Sinclair, seizing his quondam friend by the throat.

The soberer and calmer man had the better of mere brute force. James Wyatt shook off his assailant as easily as if he had been the athlete, and Gilbert the thinker and plotter.

'Fool,' he exclaimed, contemptuously. 'Don't waste your breath in upbraiding *me* with treachery. Look at home. Look to your own house and your

pretty wife, who recovered her senses so quickly under the influence of her German physician. Have you had many visits from that German physician, Mr. Sinclair? Perhaps he times his visits so as to avoid meeting you. You spend a good deal of your life away from Davenant, you see.'

'What do you mean?' gasped the other.

'What I say. Look at home for treachery. I gave you a hint the night our German friend first came to your house, but you were too dull to take advantage of it.'

Gilbert started, and looked at him intently.

'I remember what you said—"Watch your wife." I did watch her. What then?'

'You saw how he—the strange doctor—could awaken intelligence which no one else could rouse. You saw how she sang at his bidding—how her tears flowed—for him. A case of electro-biology, one would suppose.

'Wyatt, I shall strangle you if you don't put your meaning into the very plainest words!'

'And perhaps strangle me if I do. I must risk that, I suppose,' said Mr. Wyatt, with a laugh.

'Plainly, then, you should have made better use of your eyes that night, and seen through the disguise of a pair of smoke-coloured spectacles, and a gray wig and beard. The man who came to your house with Lord Clanyarde was Sir Cyprian Davenant.'

'It's a lie!' cried Gilbert Sinclair.

'It's as true as that your wife's recovery dates from the hour of his visit.'

'You knew this—you—my legal adviser—friend—and you sold my estate to that man—knowing this!' cried Sinclair, almost inarticulate with passion.

'Again I must repeat that I never professed to be your friend. As your legal adviser I had no right to interfere in your domestic affairs. As to the sale of the property, I cannot see how that affects your position with Sir Cyprian.'

If Gilbert could have flown at the man's throat again, and strangled him, there might have been some satisfaction in that act of savagery. To call him bad names—and to see his sardonic grin as he heard them, was a poor relief—but it was all that civilization allowed. Gilbert hurled some of the

hardest epithets in the vocabulary of abuse at that smiling traitor, and then flung himself out of the room and out of the house.

The hansom was waiting for him—meekly as your most spirited hansom will wait on a balmy evening for a safe customer. The young May moon was up in the soft opal sky.

'Charing Cross Station—double fare,' cried Mr. Sinclair, and the cab-horse enlivened the shades of quiet Bloomsbury by the clatter of his poor chipped hoofs upon the macadamized road.

* * * * * *

James Wyatt paced his room in the darkening shadows, deep in thought. He had sent a poisoned barb to the heart of the man he hated, and he was glad. There was not a petty slight of days gone by, not a small insolence for which he had not paid himself handsomely by to-night's work—but it was not to avenge the millionaire's petty slights and small insolences, not to uplift the wounded crest of his own self-esteem, viper-like, that he had stung his enemy. His hatred of Gilbert Sinclair had a deeper root than wounded pride. Disappointed

love was its source. But for Gilbert Sinclair he might have been loved by the one woman whose regard he valued. Clara Walsingham's constancy to her old lover was the offence that made Gilbert loathsome to his quondam friend—and it was to gratify his own jealousy that Wyatt had aroused the demon of jealousy in his rival's breast.

'He shall know the flavour of the anguish he has caused me,' thought Wyatt, 'if his coarse soul can suffer as I have suffered for a woman's sake. Whether his wife is guilty or innocent matters nothing to me. The pain will be *his*. If he were man enough to blow his brains out, now, there might be a chance for me with Clara. So long as he lives she will cling to the hope of winning him back. Where is she hiding, I wonder, and what is her scheme of life, while I am wearing my soul out for her sake?'

Mr. Wyatt had not seen Mrs. Walsingham since that interview in which she had refused to keep faith with him, flinging her promise to the winds. He had gone to Half-moon Street on the following Saturday evening, determined to make peace with

her at any sacrifice of his own dignity, with the slavish pertinacity of a man who passionately loves. He had driven up to the door, expecting to see the lighted windows shining out on the wintry street—to hear Herr Klavierschlager pounding the Erard, and the hum and twitter of many voices, as he went up the narrow flower-scented staircase; but to his surprise the windows were all dark, and a sleepy little maid-servant came to the door with a guttering tallow candle, and informed him that Mrs. Walsingham had gone abroad, the maid-servant knew not whither.

'Was there no direction left for forwarding letters?' asked Mr. Wyatt.

'No, sir, not as I knows of. The hagent, praps, wot has the lettin' of the 'ouse might know.'

Mr. Wyatt hunted out the house-agent on Monday morning, but that useful member of society had received no information about Mrs. Walsingham's destination, whether she meant to travel or to be stationary. He was to let her house to a good tenant, and to communicate with her through her solicitor.

Mr. Wyatt went to the solicitor, who politely refused to give his client's address.

'Perhaps she has gone into a convent,' thought James Wyatt, at his wits' end; and his disappointment added not a little to the bitterness of his feelings towards that profitable client of his, Gilbert Sinclair.

. . . . . .

Staples, the butler, came in with the lamps, shut the solid old oak shutters, cleared the table, and brought his master a cup of coffee, all in an orderly and respectable manner that was well worth his sixty pounds a year. Mr. Wyatt was a man who would not have kept a bad servant a week, and who never parted with a good one.

The postman's knock sounded on the ponderous door, while Mr. Wyatt was sipping his coffee, and Staples came in with a salver-full of letters.

James Wyatt spread them out before him thoughtfully, as if they were cards, and he were calculating their value. Handsome creamy envelopes, thick and aristocratic, with armorial bearings on the seals; others blue and business-like, and unpretendingly

inexpressive. One narrow little envelope, thin, green, and shiny. This was the first he opened.

The letter it contained was written in a small scratching hand, unmistakably foreign, little curly tails to all the d's, a general scragginess in the y's, a paucity of capitals.

'Why do you not let me see you, or write to me? Is it not that it is cruel, after so much of promises? You leave me to languish, without the hope. Dream you that I shall content to be servant for always, after what you have promised? But do not believe it. I have too much spirit. It must that I talk to you of all that at leisure, the eyes in the eyes, that I may see if you are true, if you have of good intentions to my regard. Write me, and very quickly, my friend, it must that I have of your news.—Always your

'MELANIE.'

'This comes of an innocent flirtation—pour passer le temps—in a stupid country house,' said Mr. Wyatt, crumpling the letter savagely. 'This girl will worry my life out. I was a fool to amuse myself with such a dangerous little viper. And

if I were to be frank with her, and tell her to go about her business, she might make matters unpleasant for me. The law comes down rather heavily on anything in the shape of conspiracy; and our little affair at Schönesthal might be made to assume that complexion. And the law never comes down so heavily as when it gets its hoof on a victim with plenty to lose. Your British jury, too, has no liking for a man who turns his superfluous capital to good account by lending it to fools. No, I must keep that Schönesthal business out of the law courts at any cost. Melanie must be pensioned, and sent back to her native valley, or her native slum—for I should think such an artful young person must have been born in some festering city alley rather than among vineyards or orchards.'

Mr. Wyatt went to his writing table and answered Mademoiselle Duport's letter without delay —briefly and cautiously.

CHAPTER II.

GILBERT ASKS A QUESTION.

If Lord Clanyarde had been within easy reach, Gilbert Sinclair would have gone straightway to upbraid him with his treachery in bringing Sir Cyprian to Davenant disguised and in a false name; but Lord Clanyarde, finding himself at fifty years of age entirely unfettered by domestic encumbrances, was indulging his natural frivolity among a more agreeable people than his serious and business-like fellow-countrymen. Lord Clanyarde was eating ices and playing dominoes under the colonnades of Venice, with thoughts of moving to Tyrolean mountains when the weather grew too warm in the sea-girt city.

So Gilbert, not being able to get at Lord Clanyarde, nursed his wrath to keep it warm, and went straight home to Davenant Park, where Constance was leading her calm and happy life, seeing hardly

anything of what the world calls "society," but surrounded by the people she had known since her childhood—the good old rector, who had christened her; the devoted little doctor, who had watched her so patiently when her dull eyes had hardly recognized his familiar face; the schoolmistress, the old pupils, the gray old gardeners, and sunburnt gamekeepers; the gaffers and goodies who had been old when she was a baby, and seemed hardly any older for the twenty years that had passed over their heads since then. Cheeks a little more shrivelled perhaps; brows more deeply wrinkled; shoulders a trifle more bent; but exactly the same appreciation of tea and tobacco, half-crowns and new neckerchiefs, the Psalms and the Rector's sermons.

Never had spring seemed to her so beautiful as it seemed this year, when she led her little girl through the woods and showed her the newly-awakened flowers, and told her the names of the birds that poured out such gushing songs of gladness in the warm bright noon. The child's lips began to shape isolated words,—mam—mam, and

birdie, fowers, for flowers—Divine language, to the mother's ear. Never was child happier or more fondly loved. Martha Briggs, nothing doubting, hugged this little waif to her honest heart; and even Melanie, who had a curious inward revulsion from the child, felt herself constrained to pretend the deepest gratitude to Providence for the little one's restoration. Once, inspired by some familiar spirit of evil, she could not resist dropping a little poison into her mistress's cup of joy.

'Do you feel quite sure there has been no mistake, ma'am?' she asked. 'I sometimes fancy our darling could not have been saved. I saw her carried away by the current, carried past me like a straw, and it has never been quite explained how she was rescued.'

Constance looked at the girl with eyes on fire with indignation.

'Am I sure that this is my child?' she cried, clasping the baby to her breast. 'Am I sure of my own name, of my life? If all the rest of the world were a dream or a shadow, I should know

that Christabel was real and true. Who can deceive a mother?'

'You were so ill when the little girl was brought home,' suggested Melanie, with an air of conscientious doubt.

'Not too ill to remember my Christabel. We knew each other, did we not, darling? Our lips clung together as if we had never been parted. Not know my own child, indeed! Never dare to make such a suggestion again, Melanie.'

After this Mademoiselle Duport was discreetly silent on the subject of this present Christabel's identity with the Christabel of the past; but the time was to come when Constance Sinclair's faith was to receive a ruder shock.

Gilbert went home that evening after the Two Thousand, with his mind full of scorpions. Goblin's success was as nothing to him. He hardly remembered that one of his horses had won a great race, for the first time since he had kept horses. He had counted on James Wyatt's fidelity just as he had counted on his horse or his dog, a creature bought with his money, fed and housed by him.

Wyatt had profited by him; Wyatt was bound to stand by him; and as to those various slights which he had put upon his confidential adviser at divers times, almost unconsciously, it had never occurred to him that there could be any galling wound left by such small stings, the venom whereof was to react upon himself.

If he had heaped favours upon the man, if he had been the most unselfish and devoted of friends, he could not have felt James Wyatt's treachery more keenly. He was angry with himself for having been so easy a dupe, for having given any man power to get the better of him.

'The whole thing is a planned revenge,' he thought, 'Wyatt knew how it would gall me to see Sir Cyprian back at Davenant?'

And Wyatt had flung a firebrand in that revelation about the pretended German doctor. Could it be, Gilbert asked himself, or was it a malicious invention of Wyatt's? Would Lord Clanyarde have lent himself to such a deception? Surely not. But even Lord Clanyarde might have been hoodwinked by his daughter's lover.

'I won't accuse her—not yet awhile," he said to himself. 'It will be better to keep quiet and watch. I have been too often away. I have given her too much license. That innocent face of her's would deceive Satan himself. And I have allowed myself to think that there was no guile in her; that although she has never loved me, she has never wronged me. Hard to find after all that I have judged her too leniently.'

It was after midnight when Mr. Sinclair arrived at Davenant, and he had to ring up one of the servants to let him in, his return being altogether unlooked for. He did not see Constance until the next day, and by this time he had regained the mastery of himself. The position of affairs between husband and wife since Mrs. Sinclair's recovery had been a kind of armed neutrality. Gilbert had never alluded to that awful day on which he had raised his hand against his wife, nor had Constance. Doubtful whether she remembered that unhappy occurrence, and deeply ashamed of the brutality into which passion had betrayed him, Mr. Sinclair wisely kept his own counsel. To apologise might be to

make a revelation. His remorse showed itself by increased civility to his wife, and a new deference to her feelings, for which she was duly grateful. Gentle, submissive always, she gave her husband no cause of offence, save that one rankling sore which had begun to gall him directly the triumphant sense of possession had lost its power to satisfy—the consciousness that he had never won her heart. This smouldering fire needed but a spark of jealousy to raise a fatal flame.

Constance expressed herself much pleased at Goblin's success, when Gilbert announced the fact, with very little elation, on the day after the race. They were dining together *tête-à-tête*, in the spacious panelled room, which seemed so much too big for them. These ceremonious late dinners were Constance's aversion. In her husband's absence she dined early, with Christabel, and spent the long afternoons walking or driving, and came home at twilight to a social tea party with Martha Briggs and Baby.

'I didn't think you cared about race-horses,' said Gilbert, as if doubting the sincerity of his wife's congratulations.

'Not in the abstract, they are such far-off creatures. One never gets on intimate terms with them. They are like the strange animals which the Emperor Commodus brought to Rome, mere articles of luxury. But I am very glad your horse has won, Gilbert, on your account.'

'Yes, it's a great triumph for me. If I can win the Derby I shall be satisfied. Racing is confoundedly expensive, and I've had quite enough of it. I think I shall sell Goblin and the whole stud after Epsom, and the new stables into the bargain, and then I shall improve that great barrack of a place in the north, and settle down. I'm sick of this part of the world. It's too d——d civilized,' added Mr. Sinclair forcibly.

'Do you mean that you would leave Davenant?' asked Constance, with astonishment.

'Yes. I ought to have told you, by the way. Davenant ceases to be mine after Midsummer Day. I've sold it.'

'Sold Davenant!'

'Yes. I have never really cared for the place, and I had a good offer for it while you were ill.

Things were not looking very lively in the north just then, and I was in want of money. I dare say you'll be pleased, when you hear who is the purchaser,' added Gilbert, with an uncomfortable smile.

Constance seemed hardly to hear the latter part of his speech.

'To think that you should have sold Davenant—the dear old place.'

'I thought you did not care for it.'

'Not just at first, perhaps. It seemed too big for me. I liked shabby old Marchbrook better. But I have been so happy here, lately, and it is so nice to live amongst people one has known all one's life.'

'Yes, old associations are sweet,' sneered Gilbert, the demon Jealousy getting the upper hand.

'But, after all, the place itself matters very little," said Constance, anxious to avoid anything that might seem like upbraiding. No wife so conscientious in the discharge of her duty as a good woman who does not love her husband. 'I should be just as happy in any cottage in the neighbourhood.'

'Especially if you had an old friend settled here,' said Gilbert. 'You haven't asked me the name of my successor. But perhaps you know.'

'How should I know?'

'You might have means of obtaining information.'

'Who is the person, Gilbert?'

'Sir Cyprian Davenant.'

He watched her closely. Was the announcement a surprise, or did she know all about it, and was that look of grave astonishment a touch of social comedy?

She looked at him earnestly for a minute, and grew somewhat paler, he thought, as if the very sound of his rival's name were a shock to her.

'Indeed! He has bought the old place again,' she said, quietly. 'That seems only right. But I thought he had gone back to Africa.'

'Did you really?' said Gilbert, with a somewhat ironical elevation of his eyebrows. 'Well, I thought so too. But it seems he is still in England. Oh, by-the-by, do you remember that German doctor who came to see you when you were ill?'

There was a purpose in the abruptness of this question. He wanted to take her off her guard;—if possible, to startle her into betraying herself. If there were any truth in Wyatt's assertion this question must be a startling one.

Her calm look told him nothing. She was either innocent of all guile or the most consummate hypocrite.

'Yes, I can faintly remember. I can just recall that night, like a dream. I remember papa and you coming into my room, and a curious-looking old man, with a kind voice—a voice that went to my heart, somehow.'

Gilbert started, and frowned.

'Yes, I remember,' pursued Constance. 'It seems like a picture as I look back; your anxious looks; the firelight shining on your faces. He asked me to sing, did he not? Yes, and the song made me cry. Oh, such blessed tears—they took a load off my mind. It was like the loosening of a band of iron round my head. And he spoke to me about Christabel, and told me to hope. Dear old man, I have reason to remember him.'

'Has he never been since?'

'Never. How should he come unless you or papa brought him?'

"No, to be sure. And you have no curiosity about him—no desire to see him again?'

'Why should I be curious or anxious? He did not deceive me with false hope. My darling was restored to me.'

'And you thank him for that?'

'I thank God for having saved my child. I thank that good old doctor for being the first to tell me to hope.'

This much and no more could Gilbert's closest questioning extort from his wife. What was he to think—that Wyatt was fooling him, or that Constance was past-mistress in dissimulation? He did not know what to think, and was miserable accordingly.

CHAPTER III.

READY FOR THE WORST.

JUNE roses were opening in the flower garden at Davenant, and Gilbert Sinclair had been leading a life of the purest domesticity for the last three weeks. It hung rather heavily upon him, that domestic life, for though he loved his wife after his own fashion, he was not fond of home-joys or exclusively feminine society. But what will not a jealous man endure when once his suspicions are aroused? Patient as the spider watching his prey, he waits for the unguarded moment which shall betray the horrid secret he fears yet longs to discover.

> 'La faiblesse humaine est d'avoir
> Des curiosités d'apprendre
> Ce qu'on ne voudrait pas savoir.'

Except to see Goblin win the Derby—a feat which that estimable animal performed with honour to himself and satisfaction to every one save the

bookmen—Gilbert had not been away from Davenant since the Two Thousand. He had been told to look for treachery at home, and he was on the spot, ready to seize the traitor. No *mouchard* in the secret service of the Parisian police was ever a closer spy than the husband who doubts, yet doats, suspects, yet fondly loves.

That he had seen nothing in all this time to confirm his doubts was not enough to convince Mr. Sinclair that those doubts were baseless. He was willing to imagine profoundest hypocrisy in the wife of his bosom, a brazen front under the semblance of a pure and innocent brow. Even her devotion to her child might be a cover for a guiltier love. Her happiness, her tranquillity, gave him new ground for suspicion. Was there not some secret well-spring of contentment, some hidden source of delight masked behind this fair show of maternal affection?

These were the questions which Gilbert Sinclair was perpetually revolving in his mind during the period of domestic bliss, and this was the aspect of affairs up to the sixteenth of June. Ascot races were

to begin on the sixteenth, and on the seventeenth Goblin was to fulfil his third great engagement. This was an occasion before which even a husband's jealous fears must give way; and Gilbert had made up his mind to see the horse run. He had not carried out his idea of selling Goblin after the Derby. Jackson, the trainer, had protested vehemently against such a breach of faith with *him*, who had made the horse.

'That there 'oss is to win the Ledger,' said the indignant Jackson. 'If he don't, I'll eat him, pigskin and all.'

Gilbert felt that to part with such a horse, for ever so high a price, would be to kill the goose that laid the golden eggs.

'A horse can't go on winning great races for ever, though. There must come a turn in the tide,' suggested Gilbert, sagely. 'We should get a pot of money for him now.'

'A gentleman couldn't sell a 'oss that had just won him the blue ribbon of the turf,' replied Jackson, with a burst of chivalrous feeling. 'It would be too mean.'

Gilbert submitted to be governed by the finer feeling of his trainer, and took no step towards cutting short his career on the turf. Things were looking livelier in the coalpit district, he told himself, and a few thousand a year more or less could not hurt him. He would carry out his original idea, take a place somewhere near Newmarket, and establish his wife and—the child there.

Under ordinary circumstances he would have taken a house at Ascot during the race week, for the accommodation of himself and a selection of choice spirits with sporting tastes—where the nights might have been enlivened by blind hookey, or poker, or some equally enlightening recreation. But on this occasion Mr. Sinclair made no such comfortable arrangement, and determined to sleep at his hotel in town on the night after the great race.

He was smoking his after-dinner cigar on the evening of the sixteenth, pacing slowly up and down the terrace in front of the open drawing-room windows, when a servant brought him his letters.

The first he opened was from his trainer, who was in high spirits about Goblin. The next two or three were business letters of no importance. The last was in a strange hand, a niggling, scratchy little hand, which, if there be any expression in penmanship, was suggestive of a mean and crafty nature in the writer.

Gilbert tore open the envelope, expecting to find some insinuating 'tip' from a gentleman of the genus 'tout.' But the letter was not even so honest as a tip. It was that snake in the grass, an anonymous warning.

'If Mr. Sinclaire is away to-moro nite he will mis an oportunitie to learn sumthing he ouht to kno. If he wants to kno a secret let im wattch the balcone of is wif's room betwin tenn and leven to-moro nite,—a frend.'

Such a letter falling into the hands of a generous-minded man would have aroused only contempt—but coming to a man who had given himself up as a prey to suspicion and jealousy, who had long been on the watch for domestic treachery, even this venomous scrawl became significant as the

voice of Fate—an oracle to be obeyed at any cost.

'She has taken advantage of my intended absence already, and has made an appointment with her lover,' thought Gilbert Sinclair. 'This warning comes from one of my servants, I dare say—some scullery-maid, who has found out my wife's infamy, and pities the deluded husband. Rather hard to swallow pity from such a quarter.'

Then came the natural reaction.

'Is it a hoax, I wonder? A trick played upon me by some dismissed underling? Yet, how should any one know how to put his finger on the spot that galls? Unless it were that scoundrel Wyatt, who hates me like poison. Well, at the least, I can take the hint, and be on the watch. God help Cyprian Davenant if he crosses my threshold with evil intent! He may have deceived me once. He shan't deceive me again.'

Mr. Sinclair went to Ascot next day as he had intended. Any change in his plans would have put his wife upon her guard. He went to the races, looking uncommonly glum, as his friends politely

informed him. So gloomy, indeed, were his looks that some of his intimates made haste to hedge their bets about Goblin, making very sure that the Derby winner had been seized by some sudden indisposition. The event rewarded their caution, for Goblin, although brought up to the starting post in magnificent condition, failed to get a place. Gilbert bore his disappointment with supreme stoicism. Goblin's victory would not have made him smile, his failure hardly touched him. It was provoking, of course; but Destiny and Mr. Sinclair had long been at odds. This was another item added to an old account.

He drove to the station directly Goblin's race was over, and as there was another race to come he got a place in the train easily. It started immediately, and he was in London before seven o'clock, and on his way to Davenant at eight. He had not stopped to dine. A biscuit and a glass of brandy and soda were all he cared to take in his present frame of mind.

It was striking nine as he left the quiet little Kentish station, not quite clear as to what his next

step ought to be. He had been told to watch his wife's room between ten and eleven. To do this with any effect he must get into the house unobserved, or find a safe post of observation in the garden. To announce his return home would be, of course, to destroy his chance of making any discovery; and by this time he had made up his mind that there was domestic treachery to be discovered. As to the means he cared little, or nothing. To meet treachery with treachery could be no dishonour.

It was dusk, the sweet summer dusk, when he entered the park, through a gate seldom used by any one but gamekeepers or servants. The nightingales were breaking out into sudden gushes of melody, calling and answering one another from distant clumps of chesnut or beech, but Mr. Sinclair took no heed of the nightingales. In his happiest frame of mind that melodious jug-jugging would have made no particular impression upon his unsensitive ear—to-night all senses were more or less in abeyance. He found his way along the narrow footpath mechanically, looking neither to the right nor the left,

and only roused himself when he came within sight of the house.

How to get in unobserved and reach his room without meeting any of the servants was the question.

A moment's reflection showed him that this ought to be easy enough. Half-past nine o'clock was the servants' supper hour at Davenant; and meals in the servants' hall are an institution which even domestic convulsions leave unshaken. A funeral makes no difference in the divine right of servants to dine and sup at a certain hour: a wedding may cause some supererogatory feasting, but can hardly overthrow the regular order of the daily meals. Mr. Sinclair had no fear therefore of any alteration in the routine of the household; and he knew by experience that his servants liked to take their time at the social evening meal.

It was twenty minutes to ten when he stopped for a minute or so in the shrubbery to consider his plans. Between ten and eleven, said the anonymous letter. He had no time to lose.

He skirted the lawn in front of the drawing-room windows, keeping in the shadow of the trees. The

windows were all open. Lamps were burning on the tables, candles on the open piano, but his wife was not there. He went in at one of the windows. The child's toys were lying on the floor by Constance's favourite chair. An open work basket, and a little pile of books on a gipsy table, showed that the room had been lately occupied.

'She has gone to the balcony room, to keep her appointment,' he thought, savagely; for by this time he had accepted the anonymous warning as a truth.

The hall was as empty as the drawing-room. The lamps burned dimly, being the last invention in lamps that do not illuminate. Gilbert went softly up the shallow old staircase to the corridor which ran the length of the house, and ended at the door of his own snuggery. He reached this door without meeting any one, went quietly into the room, and locked the door. The oriel window of this room commanded the balcony room, which was recessed in the southern front, between two projecting wings. There could be no better post of observation for the man who had been told to watch the garden approach to his wife's rooms.

There were matches and candles on the mantelpiece, but to strike a light would be to make his presence known to any one in the balcony room, so Gilbert waited quietly in the half darkness of a summer night, and found what he wanted easily enough by the sense of touch. There was no moon yet, but a few stars were shining faintly in the calm grey sky. The windows of the balcony room were dark, and one stood open—the one nearest the iron stair. Gilbert observed this.

'She is sitting there in the dark,' he thought, 'waiting for him. That dark room, that open window look like guilt. Why has she not her lamp lighted, and her music or her books? No, she has something else to think of.'

His guns were arranged in artistic order above the chimney-piece—a costly collection, with all the latest improvements in sporting guns. His hands wandered here and there among the stocks till they came to a favourite rifle, the lightest in his collection, and one of the surest. He had shot many a royal stag with it beyond the Tweed. He took down this gun, went to a drawer where he kept ammunition, and selected

his cartridge, and loaded his gun in a steady, business-like manner. There was no faltering of the hand that dropped the cartridge into its place, though that hand meant murder.

'He refused to fight me,' Gilbert Sinclair said to himself. 'He lied to me until I was fool enough to believe his lies. I gave him fair warning. He has tricked and insulted me in the face of that warning. He has entered my house once as an impostor and a liar. If he tries to enter it a second time as a thief and a seducer, his blood be upon his own head.'

CHAPTER IV.

CAUGHT IN THE TOILS.

Ten o'clock struck with sweet and solemn chime from the square tower of the parish church as Gilbert Sinclair opened the lattice, and stood by the window of his dressing-room, waiting. There was not a leaf stirring in the garden, not a shadow save the motionless shadows of the trees. No light in the windows of the balcony room. The stars brightened in the clear grey, and in the soft twilight all things were dimly defined—not dark, but shadowy.

The quarter chimed from the church tower behind the trees yonder, and still there was no movement in the garden. Gilbert stood motionless, his attention divided between the old Dutch garden with its geometrical flower-beds and stone sun-dial, and the windows of the balcony room. As the sound of the church clock dwindled slowly into silence, a light appeared in the centre window, a candle held in a

woman's hand, and raised above her head. Gilbert could but faintly distinguish the dark figure in the feeble glimmer of that single candle before figure and light vanished.

A signal, evidently, for a minute later a man appeared from the angle of the hedge, where he had been hidden in shadow. A man—tall, strongly built—yes, just the figure that patient watcher expected—stepped lightly across the garden, carefully keeping to the narrow gravel paths, leaving no tell-tale footprint on flower-bed or box-border. He reached the iron stair, mounted it swiftly, and had his foot on the balcony, when Gilbert Sinclair fired, with the unerring aim of a practised sportsman, and the firm hand of a man who has made up his mind for the worst.

The figure reeled, swayed for a moment on the topmost step, and then rolled backwards down the light iron stair, shaking it with the force of the fall, and sank in a heap on the gravel path below.

Gilbert waited, expecting to be thrilled by a woman's piercing shriek, the despairing cry of a guilty soul; but no such cry came. All was darkness

in the balcony room. He fancied he saw a figure approach the window and look out, but whatever that shape was it vanished before he could verify his doubts.

He went over to the chimney-piece and put away his gun, as coolly as if the purpose for which he had just used it were the most ordinary business of daily life; but this mechanical tranquillity had very little significance. It was rather the automatic precision of a sleep-walker than the calmness of a mind that realises the weight and measure of its acts. He went back to the window. There lay the figure, huddled in a formless heap, as it had fallen, hideously foreshortened from Gilbert's point of sight. The outspread hands clutched the loose gravel.

No sound, no light yet in the balcony room.

'She does not know what has happened,, said Gilbert, grimly. 'I had better go and tell her.'

He unlocked his door and went out in the corridor. His wife's bedroom opened out of the balcony room. The child slept in a smaller room adjoining that. He went into the balcony room, and

found it empty, then opened the bedroom door and paused on the threshold, looking in.

Impossible to imagine a more peaceful picture than that which met the husband's eyes! A night-lamp shed a faint light over the curtained bed, an open book and an extinguished candle on a little table by the bedside showed that Constance had read herself to sleep. The door of the inner room stood half open, and Gilbert could see the little white crib, and the sleeping child. The mother's face was hardly less placid in its repose than the child's.

Gilbert Sinclair felt as if this world and this life were one inextricable confusion. The anonymous letter had told him where and when to watch—and the writer of that letter had kept faith with him so far—since he had not watched in vain. But this spectacle of innocent repose, the mother sleeping near the child, was hardly in keeping. Gilbert paused irresolute—and then went to his wife's bedside and roused her roughly with his strong hand upon her arm.

The gentle eyes opened suddenly and looked at him full of bewilderment.

'Gilbert! Back to-night? I didn't expect you. Why do you look at me like that? What has happened?'

'Can't you guess? You didn't expect me. You had made your plans accordingly. You had made an appointment with your lover.'

'Gilbert, are you mad?'

'He has not disappointed you—he is here. Get up and come and see him. Quick. He is waiting.'

'Gilbert, what have you been doing—where have you been? Calm yourself, for heaven's sake.'

She had risen and put on her slippers and dressing-gown, scared by her husband's looks and words, not knowing whether to think him mad or drunk—recalling with a shudder that other scene in the summer house, and expecting some new violence. He would kill her perhaps. She trembled a little, believing herself in the power of a madman, but tried to be calm.

'Come,' he said, grasping her wrist, 'I am too much a gentleman to let your lover wait yonder—on the threshold of his own house, too. Strange, that

he should try to sneak in like a burglar, when he will be master here in a few days.'

He dragged her into the next room, and to the balcony.

'Pray, don't be so violent, Gilbert. I will come anywhere you please,' she said, quietly.

From the balcony she saw that prostrate figure at the foot of the stairs, and gave á faint cry of horror.

'Gilbert, what have you done?'

'My duty as a man. I should loathe myself if I had done less.'

She followed him down the steps, trembling in every limb, and clung to him as he knelt by the motionless figure, and turned the face upward to the faint light of a new risen moon.

A very familiar face, but not the one Gilbert Sinclair expected to see. The face of his ally, James Wyatt, grey with the dull grey of death, but not distorted. A mean, false face in life or death; but death brought out the dominant expression a little more forcibly than life had done.

'Gilbert, what have you done?' repeated Constance, sobbing hysterically.

'Murder,' answered her husband, with a stolid despair. 'I hated this fellow badly enough, but I didn't mean to kill him. I meant to kill Sir Cyprian Davenant, with whom you had made an appointment to-night, counting on my absence.'

'Gilbert, what have I ever done that you should think me the vilest of women? I have never wronged you by one thought about Cyprian Davenant, which you might not know; I have never spoken a word to him which you might not hear—you and all the world. Your jealousy of him has been madness from first to last, and now it has ended in murder.'

'I have been trapped somehow. Some enemy has set a snare for me.'

'What are you to do? Oh, Gilbert, is he dead?'

'Yes, my bullet finished him. I aimed under his shoulder, where I knew it would be fatal. What am I to do? Cut and run, I suppose?'

'Yes; go, go—it is your only chance. No one knows yet. Go, for God's sake, this moment.'

'And leave you with a corpse on the premises?—rather cowardly that.'

'Don't think of me—it is life or death for you.

You must go, Gilbert. There is no help. Go, or you will be taken, tried, and hanged,' cried Constance, clinging to the iron rail, trembling, icy cold, the ground reeling under her feet.

'Yes, that's the natural sequence. Fool, fool, fool! An anonymous slanderer. What can have brought him here, and to the windows of your room? Constance, what does it mean? Do you know why this man came?'

But Constance could not answer him. She had fallen, fainting, on the iron stair.

Gilbert carried her back to her room, and laid her on her bed. She would come to her senses soon enough, no doubt, poor wretch, he thought, hopelessly. He hurried back to his victim, intent upon finding some clue to Wyatt's presence in that place to-night. He ransacked the dead man's pockets, took out a bundle of letters, put them in his breast pocket, and left the garden by the little gate in the holly hedge. The church clock chimed the half-hour as he entered the park. It seemed to him as if that last quarter of an hour had been half a lifetime. Now for the first time he drew breath, and began to think what he

ought to do. Cut and run,—yes, as his wife said, that was about his only chance.

He stopped for a minute among the shadows of the tall old elms, gaunt rugged old trunks from which wintry blasts and summer storms had swept many a limb, stopped to 'pull himself together,' in his own phraseology, and settle what he should do.

There was an up train—the last—due at the little station yonder at five minutes before eleven. If he could catch that and sleep at his hotel—the place where he was known—and his rooms taken for to-night? He would have to run for it, but it might be done; and then he would be able to prove an alibi, provided no one saw him at the station.

He reached the rough little bye-road leading to the station, breathless, as the bell rang. He did not go into the ticket-office, where the porters might have recognized him, but scrambled up the embankment upon which the station-master grew his potatoes and strawberry plants, and was on the platform, at the end furthest from the station, as the train came in. It was full of market people, soldiers or militia, noisy excursionists. He opened a crowded third

class carriage with his key and got in among the rabble. A sergeant in an advanced state of beer was inclined to resent the intrusion, a woman with a baby seconded the sergeant. The atmosphere was cloudy with the reek of bad tobacco. Not much chance of recognition here.

He had his season-ticket, but did not care to show it. The fact might be remembered by some quick-witted collector. The train had only come from Maidstone. He thought it safer to pay his fare through, at the station where tickets were examined.

It was a little after midnight when Mr. Sinclair drove up to his hotel—a small house in St. James's, chiefly affected by men about town.

'Room ready, James? Yes, of course it is. You got my telegram yesterday. Been dining with some fellows—kept me deuced late. You can bring me a brandy and soda upstairs. That's all.'

'Sorry the 'orse lost, sir,' said the man, with respectful sympathy.

'What horse?' asked Gilbert, with a vacant look.

'Beg your pardon, sir—Goblin, sir—thought he was safe to win the Cup. Took the liberty to put

'arf a sufferin on him. You bein' a old customer, you see, sir, and all of us feelin' interested in the 'oss on that account.'

'That was a good fellow. The ground was too hard for him—goes better in the dirt?'

He went up to his bedroom after this brief colloquy, leaving the head waiter under the impression that Mr. Sinclair had been dining rather more freely than usual.

'Didn't seem to understand me when I spoke to him about his own 'oss,' said the waiter to his friends in council; 'stared at me reg'lar mazed.'

'Ah, pore feller, he's 'it pretty 'ard to-day, you may depend.'

Mr. Sinclair's last order to the waiter, who carried the brandy and soda to his bedroom, was to be called at half-past six next morning.

'You'll have a cab at the door at a quarter-past seven,' he said; 'I want to catch the seven-thirty train into Kent. I ought to have got home to-night if I could have done it.'

'Yes, sir; half-past six, sir. Anything particklar you would like for breakfast?'

'Oh, anything!'

'A bit of fish, sir, and a spatch-cock, or a devil?' suggested the waiter, pertinaciously. Nothing can subdue that solicitude to obtain an order which is the waiter's ruling passion.

'Fish—flesh—anything,' cried Gilbert, kicking off his boots.

'A salmon cutlet, sir, with Dutch soss?'

'An elephant, if you like. Get me the cab at a quarter-past seven. A hansom, with a good horse.'

'Yes, sir, an 'ansom and a fast 'oss. Yes, sir. Tea or coffee, sir?'

Mr. Sinclair banged his door in the waiter's face.

'The Baron Osy starts at eight to-morrow,' said Gilbert, referring to his Bradshaw, the only literature he carried about him constantly. 'I shall be in Antwerp on Saturday.'

Then, after a pause, he asked himself,—

'Might it not be wiser to hold my ground and trust to the chapter of accidents? Who is to bring that traitor's death home to me? I sleep here to-night. No one saw me at Davenant.'

Again, after another interval of thought,—

'How can I be sure that no one saw me yonder? These things are always brought home to a man somehow. A child—a dog—an idiot—the halt—dumb—blind—some unexpected witness rises up against him and puts the rope round his neck. My best chance is to put the seas between me and a coroner's jury. First, Antwerp, and then a steamer for South America—Carthagena, or some lawless place where a man might laugh at extradition treaties. Besides, I'm sick of it all at home—too sick to stand to my guns and outface suspicion, and live in this country with that dead man's face staring at me. No, I'll try some strange, wild land, a new life that will be fiery enough to burn out the memory of the old one.'

He went to the mantelpiece, where a pair of wax candles were burning, with that air of elegant luxury by which your skilled hotel keeper seeks to reconcile his customers to the extravagance of his charges, and took James Wyatt's letters out of his breast-pockets.

The first three or four he looked at were business letters, chiefly entreaties to 'renew' or carry over, or provide for some little bill just falling due, 'like

the best of good fellows.' These Gilbert laid aside, after a glance, but there was one at which he started as if he had touched a snake. It was in the same hand as the anonymous letter that had made him a murderer.

This, in plain words, was the gist of the letter—badly spelled, with a foreigner's uncouth orthography—curiously worded, with a mixture of foreign idioms and illiterate English.

'You tell me that all your promises amount to nothing, that you never meant to marry me. Rather hard to discover this after having nursed my delusion so long. I was to be a lady. I was to take my place in the world. Bah! all lies! Lies, like your pretended love—your pretended admiration. You ask me to go back to my country, and promise if I consent to this I shall be provided for—handsomely—with fifty pounds a year for life, whether I remain single or marry—an independence for a girl like me, you say. *Soit.* But who is to secure to me this independence? It may be paid me for a year—two years, perhaps—and then cease. It must that I see you, Mr. Wyatt. It must that I hear of your proper

mouth what you mean. Your soft tongue is too strong for me. You could persuade me to do anything—to go anywhere—to serve and obey you as your slave; but I cannot obey to your letters. I do not understand. I want to see things clearly—to have your views explained to me.

'You say that I am passionate—vindictive—and that when last we met—and, ah! how kind it was of you to come here at my request—my violence almost frightened you. Believe me, I will not so offend again. Come but once more—only come and assure me with your own lips that this miserable pittance shall be paid to me honourably year by year—give me but your word for that and I will go back to my friends in the South of France—ah—*comme ce sera loin de toi, mon ami*—and you shall hear of me never again.

'You tell me that you are no longer friends with Mr. Sinclair, and that you cannot come to his house, and that if I want to see you it must that I come to you. That cannot without throwing up my place altogether, for the housekeeper here is of the most tyrannical, and gives no servant leave to absent her-

self, and I will not give up this service until I am assured of my future. Give me then a proof of your good faith by coming here. Give me my pittance a year in advance, and show me how it is to be afterwards paid me, and I will trouble you no more.

'It will be very easy for you to come on the evening of the 17th. Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair are going to Ascot on the 15th; they will be absent some days. You know your way to the balcony room. I shall be waiting for you there between ten and eleven on Thursday evening, and I will show a light in the centre window as a signal that the coast is clear.

'Come if you wish me to trust you. Come if you do not wish me to betray you.

'Yours, as you treat me,

'MELANIE DUPORT.'

This letter showed Gilbert Sinclair the trap that had been set for James Wyatt and for himself. He had been made the instrument of the Frenchwoman's revenge.

In the face of this revelation what was he to do? Carry out his intention; go to South America, and

leave his wife in the power of this fiend? Gilbert Sinclair was not bad enough for that.

'I'll risk it, and go back to Davenant,' he said. 'How do I know what this wretch might do? She might lay her lover's death at my wife's door. Drag my wife's name in the gutter. No, at any hazard to myself I must be there, and, if necessary, this letter must be shown at the inquest.'

CHAPTER V.

CROWNER'S QUEST.

It was between six and seven o'clock in the morning, when one of the gardeners at Davenant, going with a barrowful of bedding-out plants to the old Dutch garden, found James Wyatt lying dead at the bottom of the iron staircase. He rushed into the house for aid, and brought out the newly-risen men-servants, who had not yet fortified exhausted nature with an Elizabethan breakfast of beef and beer. All was hubbub and confusion; one messenger ran for the doctor, another for the police. The dead man was carried into a great disused brewhouse at the back of the stables, as a place where he would not hurt any one's feelings, as the butler remarked, considerately.

'What a horful thing!' said one housemaid, and 'Who could have done it?' ejaculated another, as the news of the catastrophe spread through the house.

Who was to tell Mrs. Sinclair?

Martha Briggs took that office upon herself. She had just filled Miss Christabel's bath, but the darling was not awake yet, and Mrs. Sinclair was most likely still asleep.

'I'll tell her when I take her her cup of tea at half-past seven,' said Martha, looking pale and scared.

'Where's Melanie?' asked the upper housemaid.

'She asked leave to go to London early this morning, to get herself some things. As if Maidstone wasn't good enough for her! She wanted to go by the first train to have a long day of it, she said. The first train goes at six. She must have left this house at half-past five.'

'That's queer,' said the housemaid. 'But I never had much opinion of foreigners.'

'What could have brought Mr. Wyatt here last night, and to the bottom of those steps?' speculated Martha Briggs. 'Why didn't he go to the hall door, as usual? It seems so strange!'

'It seems stranger that there should be any one there to shoot him,' remarked the housemaid.

Mrs. Sinclair heard of the morning's discovery with a calmness which astonished her handmaiden.

'I must telegraph to my husband,' she said; and a telegram was despatched without delay, addressed to Gilbert at his hotel in St. James's.

The police were on the alert by this time, examining the scene of the murder. The coroner appointed three o'clock in the afternoon for his inquiry, which was to be held in the hall at Davenant. This would give time for summoning the jury.

Constance was sitting at breakfast, very pale but quite self-possessed, when Gilbert Sinclair walked in from the lawn.

'Gilbert,' she cried, 'what folly! I thought you were across the Channel by this time.'

'No, Constance, I am not such a poltroon. We have not been a very happy couple, you and I; and God knows I am heartily tired of my life in this country; but I am not base enough to leave you in the lurch. Who can tell what scandal might arise against you? No, my dear, I shall stop, even if the end is to be a rope.'

'Gilbert, for mercy's sake! Oh, Gilbert!' she

cried, wringing her hands, 'how could you do this dreadful thing?'

'How could I? I thought I was doing my duty as a man. I was told that a man was to be here—your secret visitor. The man was here, at the very hour I had been told to expect him. I saw him entering your room by stealth. What could I think but the worst? And thinking as I did I had a right to kill him.'

'No, Gilbert, no; God has given no man the right to shed his brother's blood.'

'Except Jack Ketch, I suppose? God has given men the instinct of honour and honour teaches every honest man to kill the educer of his wife or daughter.'

* * * *

The inquest was held at three. Gilbert and several of his household, notably the gardener who found the body, were examined. Dr. Webb gave his evidence as to the nature of the wound, and the hour at which death must, in all probability, have occurred.

'Did you sleep at Davenant last night, Mr. Sinclair?' asked the coroner.

'No. I only came up from Ascot yesterday evening, and spent the night in London.'

'Where?'

'At Hildred's Hotel, Jermyn-street.'

'Did you dine at the hotel?'

'No, I dined at Francatelli's.'

This was a venture. Francatelli's would doubtless have been crowded on the night after Ascot, and it would be difficult for the waiters to assert that Mr. Sinclair had not dined there.

'You dined at Francatelli's. Where is that?' asked one of the jury, with rural innocence.

'It is an hotel and restaurant, in Piccadilly.'

'How long were you at Francatelli's?' asked the coroner.

'I really cannot tell. My horse had been running at Ascot, and losing. I was somewhat excited. I may have gone into Francatelli's at eight, and gone out again between nine and ten.'

'And from Francatelli's you went to your hotel?'

'No,' said Gilbert, feeling that there was a hiatus of a couple of hours here. 'I went into the Haymarket Theatre for an hour or two.'

'If this fellow asks me what I saw there I'm done for,' he thought; but happily the coroner was not so much on the alert as to put that question.

'Have you any idea what brought the deceased to your house last night, when you were known to be absent?'

'I have a very clear idea.'

'Be kind enough to tell us all you can.'

'Coming from the station this morning by a footpath through the park, the way by which the deceased always came to my house when he did not drive from the station, I found a letter, which it seems to me that he must have dropped there last night.'

'You found a letter dropped by the deceased in Davenant Park?'

'I found this letter addressed to Mr. Wyatt, which I conclude must have been dropped by him last night.'

Gilbert handed the coroner Melanie's letter, which had now assumed a crumpled and dilapidated appearance, as of a letter that had lain all night in the dew and dirt of the footpath under the trees.

The coroner puzzled through the letter, reading

it aloud, with various mistakes and pullings up and tryings back, the jury listening open mouthed.

'This clearly indicates that Mr. Wyatt came here by appointment, remarked the coroner sagely. 'Who is this Melanie Duport ?'

'My wife's maid.'

'Why has she not been called ?'

It was explained to the coroner that Melanie Duport was missing.

After this, the jury having duly viewed the body, or, at any rate, made believe to view it, the inquest was adjourned, to give the local police time to make their investigations, though what they were to investigate seemed a somewhat puzzling question.

'They'll bring some London detectives, who will look into my room, see those guns, and then put two and two together,' thought Gilbert. 'I don't suppose my *alibi* would hold water at the assizes. A jury would want some independent evidence to sustain my account of my time between seven o'clock and midnight yesterday.'

* * * * *

The inquest was adjourned from Friday—the

day after the murder—until the following Monday When that day came Gilbert Sinclair was missing. London detectives had come to the aid of the local constabulary, but too late to keep an eye upon the movements of Mr. Sinclair. That gentleman contrived to leave Liverpool on Saturday morning, in a steamer bound for Rio. His disappearance gave a new aspect to the case, and aroused suspicions of his guilt. His household knew nothing of his whereabouts. He had told Mrs. Sinclair and his body-servant that he was going to Newmarket, and would be back in time for the inquiry on Monday: but on an inquiry being telegraphed to his Newmarket establishment the reply was to the effect that Mr. Sinclair had not been seen there.

The police had occupied the interval between Friday and Monday in the endeavour to find Mademoiselle Duport, but up to noon on Monday that young lady had not been heard of, nor was any new fact disclosed at the inquest.

Enlightened by Gilbert Sinclair's disappearance, the police took a bolder flight. They discovered that the oriel window in Mr. Sinclair's study afforded

an excellent point of aim for the iron staircase, at the foot of which the murdered man had been found. They also opined that the handsome collection of guns in that apartment suggested a ready way of accounting for the mode and manner of the act. Subsequent investigation showed that the deer stalker's rifle in that collection carried a bullet exactly corresponding in size and shape to the bullet extracted from James Wyatt's death-wound. Professional acumen led the investigators further to perceive that Mr. Sinclair's own account of his time on the evening of the murder was not supported by any other evidence, and that it was possible for him to have come back to Davenant and to have entered and left his house unseen by any of the household.

These suspicions were in some measure confirmed by the statement of the waiter at Hildred's Hotel, who described Mr. Sinclair's arrival at that house after midnight, and a certain strangeness in his look and manner which had struck him at the time, and which he had spoken about to his fellow-servants afterwards.

Suspicion thus aroused, the next step was to pursue the suspected man; but Gilbert Sinclair had been lucky enough to get away from England without leaving any trail behind him. It had been a particularly busy time on the Liverpool quay that June morning, half a dozen big steamers starting for different parts of the globe—commerce at her best on the Mersey, and the trade with South America thriving. The business-like looking man with a single portmanteau, had taken his berth, and slipped on board the *Chimborazo* without attracting special notice from any one; and for once in a way Scotland Yard was at fault.

The coroner's inquest dragged its slow length along. No new evidence was elicited to make the case stronger against Gilbert Sinclair. The fact of his departure remained the one damning fact against him.

There was also the fact of Melanie Duport's disappearance on the morning of the murder, and opinions were divided as to which of these two was guilty, or whether both had not been concerned in the act.

The newspapers made much capital out of an event which soon became known as the Davenant Mystery, and Constance Sinclair had the horror of knowing that she was the object of a morbid interest in the minds of the nation at large. She left Davenant almost immediately after her husband, and took up her abode at Marchbrook, with Martha Briggs and the little girl for her only companions, until the arrival of Lord Clanyarde from the Continent.

The inquiry before the coroner ended at last in an open verdict. The deceased had been shot by some person or persons unknown.

Davenant was formally taken possession of upon Midsummer Day, not by Sir Cyprian Davenant, but by his lawyer, who installed some of the old family servants as care-takers. Sir Cyprian had left England a few days before James Wyatt's death for the north of Europe, his long talked of African expedition being postponed till the autumn.

The year wore round, and the horror of James Wyatt's unexplained death faded out of the national mind, as all such horrors do fade when the newspapers leave off writing about them. Constance lived

her quiet life at Marchbrook, as she had lived at Davenant, happy with her child, yet mindful, with a shuddering pity, of that friendless wanderer doomed to bear the brand of Cain. Christmas came and passed, and for nearly a year she had remained in ignorance of her husband's fate. Then came a letter in a strange hand, but signed by Gilbert Sinclair.—

'Dear Constance,

'I am down with a malignant fever common to this part of the world, and generally fatal. Before I die I should like to ask you to forgive me for all the pain my jealousy gave you in days gone by, and to tell you that I now believe that jealousy to have been causeless. It was what the thieves call a "put up" business, and Wyatt was the Iago. He set a trap for me, and got snared himself in the end.

'I want to tell you something else which may perhaps distress you, but which is no fault of mine. The child you are so fond of is not your own. Poor little Christabel was really drowned, and the little girl brought to Davenant while you were ill is a child adopted for the purpose of bringing about your

recovery. This plan was suggested to me by your father. He knows all about it.

'I have made my will, and sent it to my London lawyers. I leave you everything. So, if matters continue prosperous in the north, you will be a very rich woman. I wasted a good deal of money on the Newmarket stable; but, with your quiet life, you will soon recover lost ground. Of course you will marry C. D. Well, I can't help that. I ought never to have thrust myself between you and your first love. Nothing but misery has come of our marriage.

'God bless you, and give you a happier life than you would ever have spent with me.

'Your dying husband,

'GILBERT SINCLAIR.

'P.S.—If I go, the man who writes this, Thomas Grace, tobacco grower, will send you the certificate of my death, and all necessary evidence. If I live, you shall hear from me again.'

CHAPTER VI.

CRUEL KINDNESS.

THAT letter from her dying husband was a crushing blow to Constance Sinclair. There was the keen sense of loss, the knowledge that her lovely child had verily sunk beneath the German river, never to rise again, save as a spirit amidst the choir of angels. There was the deep humiliation of knowing that she had been duped. They had taken advantage of her affliction, and consoled her with a lie. She had been fooled, deceived, and deluded, as a child is deluded, for her good. Her soul rose up against this mockery of consolation in bitterest anger. Her very thanksgivings to Heaven—those outpourings of a mother's grateful heart overflowing with its wealth of joy—had been offered up in vain. She had no reason to be thankful. Heaven and earth had conspired in ill-treating her. God had taken away her reason, and man had imposed upon her folly. Whom upon earth

could she ever trust again, when even her father had so deceived her ?

With her husband's letter came the certificate of his death. The same post brought her a letter from Gilbert's lawyers to inform her of their receipt of his will, executed on his death-bed.

She was sorry for the wasted life, the lonely death in a strange land, and Gilbert Sinclair was mourned with more honest tears than are always shed for a husband's loss, even when the journey of wedded life has begun in the rosy light of a romantic love.

After those tears given to the untimely dead the widow's thoughts were full of anger. She could not forgive the deception that had been practised, even though it had been done to save her life.

'Better a thousand times to have died in that dim dream than to awake to such a disappointment as this,' she said.

And then she thought of the river in the fair German valley, and that agonizing day which she had learned to look back upon as no more than a painful and prolonged dream. She knew now that it had been no dream, but a hideous reality.

While she sat with Gilbert's letter open before her, abandoned to a tearless despair, the little one's voice sounded in the corridor, and she heard the light, swift footstep which always made her heart thrill. To-day the familiar sound struck her with an actual pain. She rose involuntarily and ran to the door, as she had been accustomed to run to meet her pet, rejoicing at the child's approach; but with her hand upon the door she stopped suddenly.

'No, I won't see her—little impostor!—living lie! —to have stolen my love! and my dead child looking down upon me from heaven all the while—looking down to see her place filled by a stranger—lonely in heaven, perhaps, for want of a mother's love, and seeing her mother's heart given to another!'

The light tripping steps came nearer.

'Mamma! mamma!' called the glad young voice.

Constance locked the door.

'Go away,' she cried, hoarsely; 'I don't want you!'

There was a pause—complete silence—and then

a burst of sobbing. The strangeness of that tone had chilled the child's heart. Lips that had hitherto breathed only love, to-day spoke with the accents of loathing. Instinct told the child the greatness of the change.

The little feet retreated slowly down the corridor —not so light of step this time—the sobs died away in the distance.

'I will never see her face again!' cried Constance. 'Some wretched child!—perhaps the offspring of sin—base at heart as she is fair of face—and so like my lost one—so like—so like! No, I will send her away—settle a sum of money—provide handsomely for her. Poor child! it is not her crime. But I will never see her again! Yet, O God, I love her! And she is crying now, perhaps. The loving little heart will break.'

She had been pacing the room distractedly. This last thought was too much to bear. She ran to the door, unlocked it, and went out into the corridor, calling, 'Belle, darling, come back!'

She went to the little one's nursery, and found her lying with her face buried in the sofa pillow,

sobbing piteously. To-day's harsh tones were her first experience of unkindness. Constance threw herself on the sofa, and caught the child in her arms, drew the little trembling form to her breast, and kissed and cried over it.

'My pet, I love you. I shall love you to my dying day,' she cried, passionately. 'Hearts cannot be played with like this. Love cannot be given and taken away.'

The child hugged her, and was comforted, understanding the love though not the words that told it.

'Belle hasn't been naughty, has she, mamma?' she asked, with innocent wonder.

'No, pet, but mamma has been very unhappy. Mamma has had a sad letter. Oh, here comes Martha,' as that devoted nurse entered from the night nursery. 'Do you know, Martha, I think Christabel wants change of air. You must take her to Hastings for a little while.'

'Lor, mum, that would be nice. But you'll come, too, of course? You wouldn't like to be parted from her.'

'I don't know that I could come quite at first. I

might come afterwards, perhaps. I have some very sad business to attend to.'

Constance told Martha of Mr. Sinclair's death, but not a word of that imposture which had just been revealed to her. Martha had been as completely deceived as she had, no doubt, Constance argued, for she knew it was not in the girl's honest nature to assist in a deception. The changeling's likeness to the lost child had deluded them both.

'I suppose all children of the same age and complexion are alike?' thought Constance. 'And yet I fancied my baby was different from all other children.'

She wished to send the child away, in order, if it were possible, to cure herself of the habit of loving a child that had no claim on her—to love whom was a kind of treason against the beloved dead.

The preparations for the journey were hurried over. Martha was delighted to pack and be off. The child was pleased to go, but cried at parting from 'mamma.' At two o'clock in the afternoon the carriage drove Martha and her charge to the station, with the steady old Marchbrook butler for their escort. He was to take lodgings for them, and make all things easy for

them, and see them comfortably settled before he came back to Marchbrook.

Constance breathed more freely when the child was out of the house, and there was no chance of hearing that light footstep, that clear, sweet, childish voice. Yet how dreary the big old house seemed in its solitude, how gloomy the rooms, without that fluttering changeful soul and all the busy life she made around her. The family of dolls, the menagerie of woolly animals, all afflicted with the same unnatural squeak, an internal noise never heard to issue from any animal that ever existed in the zoological kingdom.

'It would have broken my heart to keep her near me,' thought Constance, 'and I feel as if it must break my heart to lose her.'

By way of solace, or to sustain her in the indignant pride which revolted against this spurious child, she tried to think of Christabel in heaven. But her thoughts wandered back to the living child, and she found herself wondering whether Martha and her charge were at the end of their journey, and longing for the telegram to announce their safe arrival.

'What folly!' she thought, angrily. 'A stranger's child, a creature that is no more to me than any of the children at the infant school, and yet I cannot tear her from my heart.'

She sent for Dr. Webb. He was in the plot, doubtless. It was at his advice, perhaps, that this heartless deception had been practised upon her. If it were so, she felt that she must hate him all her life.

The little village surgeon came briskly enough, expecting to find a mild case of measles, or some other infantile ailment, in the Marchbrook nursery. What was his astonishment when he found Constance pacing the long dreary drawing-room, pale, with two burning spots on her cheeks, her eyes bright with fever.

'My dear Mrs. Sinclair, what is the matter?'

'Everything,' cried Constance. 'My poor husband is dead, and on his death-bed wrote me a letter telling me the cruel truth. Your wicked plot has been discovered. Yes, wicked, for all lies are wicked. You cannot do evil that good may come of it. You saved my life, perhaps, but what a life! To find that

I have lavished my love upon an impostor; that when I thanked God, on my knees, for His bounteous mercies, I had received no gracious gift! He had shown no pity for my sorrows; but you—you and my father—had played at Providence, and had pretended to perform a miracle for my sake. It was an infamous deception.'

'It was designed to save your life, and, what is even more precious than life, your reason,' replied Dr. Webb, wounded by the harshness of this attack. 'But whatever blame may attach to the stratagem you may spare me your censure. I had nothing to do with it. The German physician, whom your father brought here, was the adviser from whom the suggestion came. He and your father carried it out between them. I had nothing to do but look on, and watch the effect of the shock upon you. *That* was most happy.'

'The German doctor!' said Constance, wonderingly. 'Yes, I remember him faintly, as if it were a dream—that winter night. He made me sing, did he not? His voice had a mesmerical effect upon me. I obeyed him involuntarily. His pre-

sence seemed to give me comfort, stranger though he was. It was very curious. And then he bent over me and whispered hope, and from that instant I felt happier. And it was all a mockery after all; it was a trick! Tell me who and what that child is, Dr. Webb.'

'I know nothing of her origin. Lord Clanyarde brought her to Davenant. That is all I can tell you.'

'Fool! fool! fool!' cried Constance, with passionate self-reproach, 'to take an impostor to my heart so blindly, to ask no questions, to believe without proof or witness that Heaven had performed a miracle for my happiness! What right had I to suppose that Providence would care so much for me?'

'You have great cause to be thankful for the restoration of life and reason, Mrs. Sinclair,' said the doctor, reproachfully.

'Not if life is barren and hopeless; not if reason tells me that I am childless.'

'You have learnt to love this strange child. Cannot you take consolation from that affection?'

'No. I loved her because I believed she was my own. It would be treason against my dead child to love this impostor.'

'And you will turn her out of doors, I suppose —send her to the workhouse?'

'I am not so heartless as that. Her future shall be provided for. But I shall never see her again. I have sent her to Hastings with her nurse, who adores her.'

'That's fortunate, since she is to be deprived of everybody else's affection.'

There was some acidity in the doctor's tone. He had attended the child in various small illnesses, had met her almost daily, riding her Shetland pony in the lanes, and entertained a warm regard for the pretty little winning creature, who used to purse up her lips into a rosebud for him to kiss, and had evidently not the least idea that he was old and ugly.

'Since you can tell me nothing, I shall send for my father,' said Constance. 'He must know to whom the child belongs.'

'I should imagine so,' replied the doctor, glad to feel himself absolved of all blame.

It was a painful position, certainly, he thought. He had anticipated this difficulty from the beginning of things. He was very glad to take his leave of his patient, after hazarding a platitude or two by way of consolation.

Lord Clanyarde was in Paris, enjoying the gaieties of the cheerful season before Lent, and making himself extremely comfortable in his bachelor room at the Hotel Bristol. He had married all his daughters advantageously, and buried his wife, and felt that his mission had been accomplished, and that he was free to make his pathway to the grave as pleasant as he could. From January to March he found his aged steps travelled easiest over the asphalte of Paris, and as poor Constance was happy with her adopted child he felt no scruples about leaving her to enjoy life in her own way.

Mrs. Sinclair's telegram, informing him of her husband's death, and entreating him to go to Marchbrook, disturbed the placidity of his temper.

'Poor Sinclair!' he muttered, with more fretfulness than regret. 'Pity he couldn't have died at a more convenient time. I hate crossing the Channel

in an equinoctial gale. And what good can I do at Marchbrook? However, I suppose I must go. Women are so helpless. She never cared much for him, poor child; and there's Davenant still unmarried and devoted to her. An excellent match, too, since he came into old Gryffin's money. Providence orders all things for the best. I hope I shall have a fine night for crossing.'

He was with Constance early on the following day, having lost no time in obeying her summons; but he was unprepared for the accusation she brought against him.

'Upon my life, Constance, I was only a passive instrument in the whole affair, just like little Webb. It was put to me that this thing must be done to save your life, and I consented.'

'You let a stranger take my destiny into his hands,' cried Constance, indignantly.

'He was not a stranger. He loved you dearly—was as anxious for your welfare as even I, your father.'

'The German physician, the white-haired old man who told me to hope? Why, he had never seen me before in his life!'

'The man who told you to hope, who persuaded me to agree to the introduction of a spurious child, was no German doctor. He was neither old nor white-haired, and he had loved you devotedly for years. He heard you were dying of a broken heart, and came to you in disguise in order to see if love could devise some means of saving you. The German doctor was Cyprian Davenant.'

This was another blow for Constance. The man whom she had reverenced as the soul of honour was the originator of the scheme she had denounced as wicked and cruel; and yet she could find no words of blame for him. She remembered the gentle voice which had penetrated her ear and mind through the thick mists of madness, remembered the tones that had touched her with a wondering sense of something familiar and dear. He had come to her in her apathy and despair, and from the moment of his coming her life had brightened and grown happy. It was but a delusive happiness, a false peace; and now she must go back to the old agony of desolation and incurable regret.

'You can at least tell me who and what that child is, papa,' she said after a long pause.

'Indeed, my love, I know nothing, except that Davenant told me she belonged to decently born people, and would never be claimed by any one. And the poor little thing looked so thoroughly clean and respectable. Of course at that age one can hardly tell—the features are so undeveloped—the nose more like a morsel of putty than anything human—but I really did think that the child had a thorough-bred look; and I am sure when I saw her last Christmas she looked as complete a lady as ever came out of our Marchbrook nursery.'

'She is a lovely child,' said Constance, 'and I have loved her passionately.'

'Then, my dearest girl, why not go on loving her?' pleaded Lord Clanyarde. 'Call her your adopted child, if you like, and keep her about you as your pet and companion till you are married again, and have children of your own. You can then relegate her to her natural position, and by and by get her respectably married, or portion her off in some way.'

'No,' said Constance, resolutely, 'I will never see her again.'

And all the while she was longing to take the afternoon train to Hastings and rejoin her darling.

After this there was no more for Constance Sinclair to do but to submit to fate, and consider herself once more a childless mother. Sir Cyprian was away, no one knew where, and even had he been in England Constance felt that there would be little use in knowing more than she knew already. The knowledge of the strange child's parentage could be but of the smallest importance to her, since she meant to banish the little one from her heart and home.

Lord Clanyarde and the lawyers did all that was necessary to secure Mrs. Sinclair's position as inheritor of her husband's estates. The Newmarket stables and stud were sold, and realized a considerable sum, as the training stable was supposed to be the most perfect establishment of its kind—built on hygienic principles, with all modern improvements—and was warmly competed for by numerous foolish young noblemen and gentlemen who were just setting

out on that broad road along which Gilbert Sinclair had travelled at so swift a rate. Things in the north had been steadily improving—the men were growing wiser, and arbitration between master and men was taking the place of trade-union tyranny.

Constance Sinclair found herself in a fair way to become a very rich woman; but she cared about as much for the money her husband had left her as for the withered leaves that fell from the Marchbrook elms in the dull, hopeless autumn days. What was the use of wealth to a childless widow, who could have been content to live in a lodging of three rooms, with one faithful servant?

CHAPTER VII.

AFTER MANY DAYS.

A COMMON specific for a broken heart, when the patient happens to be a person of handsome fortune —for your pauper hard work is your only cure—is foreign travel. Lord Clanyarde, who hated Marchbrook, now suggested this remedy to his daughter. He felt that it was his duty to afford her the benefit of his protection and society during the first period of her widowhood; and it struck him that it would be more agreeable for both of them to lead a nomadic life than to sit opposite each other by the family hearth and brood upon the sorrows of this mortal life, or read the family Bible.

'It would be quite the right season for Rome, love, if we were to start at once,' said Lord Clanyarde, soothingly.

He knew several pretty women in Rome—mostly Americans,—and it was just possible the hunting in

the Campagna might not be over. And there were those Bohemian artists—French and German—with their long hair and velvet coats, and free and easy painting-rooms, and wild amusing talk. Lord Clanyarde had just sufficient love of art to enjoy that kind of society. Altogether he felt that Rome was the place for Constance. She would see St. Peter's at Easter, and the Colosseum by moonlight, and so on, and the aching void in her heart would be filled.

Constance yielded to her father's suggestion with a graceful submission that charmed him. She cared very little whither she went. The little girl was still at Hastings with honest Martha; she cried sometimes for mamma, but was happy, upon the whole, Martha wrote, wondering very much why she and her charge remained so long away. Martha knew nothing of the change that had taken place in her darling's position.

'Very well, dear,' said Lord Clanyarde. 'You have only to get your boxes packed; and, by the way, you had better write to your banker for circular notes. Five hundred will do to start with.'

Father and daughter went to Italy, and Constance

tried to find comfort in those classic scenes which are peopled with august shadows; but her heart was tortured by separation from the child, and it was only a resolute pride which withheld her from owning the truth—that the little one she had believed her own was as dear to her as the baby she had lost.

Easter came with all its religious splendours, its pomps and processions, and the Eternal City was crowded with strangers. Lord Clanyarde insisted that his daughter should see everything worth seeing, so the pale fair face in widow's weeds was an object of interest and admiration for many among the spectators at the great ceremonials of the church.

Lord Clanyarde and his daughter were driving on the Corso one sunny afternoon in the Easter week, when the gentleman's attention was attracted by a lady who drove a phaeton and a pair of cobs caparisoned in a fantastical fashion, with silver bells on their harness. The lady was past her first youth, but was still remarkably handsome, and was dressed with an artistic sense of colour and a daring disregard of the fashion of the day; dressed, in a word, to

look like an old picture, and not like a modern fashion-plate.

'Who can she be?' exclaimed Lord Clanyarde. 'Her face seems familar to me, yet I haven't the faintest idea where I've seen her.'

A few yards further on he encountered an acquaintance of the London clubs, and pulled up his horses on purpose to interrogate him about the unknown in the Spanish hat.

'Don't you know her?' asked Captain Flitter, with a surprised air. 'Yes, she's handsome, but *passée; sur le retour.*'

'Who is she?' repeated Lord Clanyarde.

Captain Flitter looked curiously at Mrs. Sinclair before he answered.

'Her name is Walsingham—widow of a Colonel Walsingham, colonel in the Spanish contingent—rather a bad egg; of course, I mean the gentleman.'

A light dawned on Lord Clanyarde's memory. Yes, this was the Mrs. Walsingham whom people had talked about years ago, before Sinclair's marriage, and it was Sinclair's money she was spending now, in all probability, on that fantastical turn-out

with its jingling bells. Lord Clanyarde felt himself personally aggrieved by the lady, and yet he thought he would like to see more of her.

'Does she stay long in Rome?' he asked the club lounger.

'She never stays long anywhere, I believe; very erratic, likes artists and musical people, and that sort of thing. She has a reception every Saturday evening. I always go. One meets people one doesn't see elsewhere—not the regulation tread-mill, you know."

Lord Clanyarde asked no more. He would be sure to meet Flitter at one of the artist's rooms, and could ask him as many questions about Mrs. Walsingham as he liked.

The two men met that very evening, and the result of their conversation was Lord Clanyarde's presentation to Mrs. Walsingham at her Saturday reception.

She was very gracious to him, and made room for him on the ottoman where she was seated, the centre of a circle of enthusiastic Americans, who thought her the nicest Englishwoman they had ever met.

Under the gentle light of the wax candles Lord

Clanyarde saw the face that had so charmed him in the Spanish hat. Seeing Mrs. Walsingham closer, he discovered that her beauty was a tradition rather than a fact; but she could at least command respect in that she had not invoked the aid of art to disguise the ravages of time and care. There was something noble in the faded beauty of her face. The finely-cut features were as lovely as in the freshness of youth, but the wan cheeks and sunken eyes, the dull and joyless look when the face was in repose, told of a desolate home and a dreary life.

'Who was that lady in deep mourning you were driving with yesterday?' Mrs. Walsingham asked presently.

'My youngest daughter, Mrs. Sinclair. You knew her husband, I think, some years ago. He is lately dead.'

'Yes, I saw his death in the *Times*, in that dismal column where we shall all appear in due course, I suppose.'

Lord Clanyarde looked at the speaker thoughtfully. It occurred to him that it might not be long before she too passed into that shadowy procession

which is always travelling through the columns of our favourite newspaper, the subject of a few careless exclamations. 'Dear me! who would have thought it? It was only the other day we saw her. I wonder who gets her money?'

'Yes, he died in South America. You heard the story, I suppose? A most unfortunate business. His confidential solicitor was shot in Sinclair's own garden, by a French girl he had been foolish enough to get entangled with. The jealous little viper contrived to give the police the slip, and Sinclair saw himself in danger of being brought unpleasantly into the business, so he wisely left the country.'

'You believe that it was Melanie Duport who shot Mr. Wyatt?' Mrs. Walsingham exclaimed, eagerly.

'What! you remember the girl's name? Yes, there can hardly be a doubt as to her guilt. Who else had any motive for killing him? The creature's letter, luring him to the spot, was found in the park, and she disappeared on the morning of the murder. Those two facts are convincing, I should think,' concluded Lord Clanyarde, somewhat warmly.

He wanted to assoilzie his own race from the contamination of having intermarried with a murderer. For the manes of Sinclair, innocent or guilty, he cared very little; but a man whose grandchildren were growing big enough for Eton and Harrow had reason to be careful of the family repute.

'Yes, she was a wicked creature,' said Mrs. Walsingham, thoughtfully, 'she had a natural bent towards evil.'

'You speak as if you had known her.'

Mrs. Walsingham looked confused.

'I read the account of that dreadful business in the newspapers,' she said. 'I hope Mrs. Sinclair has quite recovered from the shock such an awful event must have caused her.'

'Well, yes, I think she has recovered from that. Her husband's death following so quickly was of course a blow, and since then she has had another trouble to bear.'

'Indeed! I am sorry,' said Mrs. Walsingham, with a thoughtful look.

'Yes. We did all for the best. She was dangerously ill, you know, about a year and a half ago, and

we—well, it was foolish, perhaps, though the plan succeeded for the moment,—we made her believe that her little girl had been saved from drowning, at Schönesthal, in the Black Forest. You may have heard of the circumstance.'

'Yes, yes.'

'It was quite wonderful. She received the strange child we introduced to her with delight—never doubted its identity with her own baby—and all went on well till poor Sinclair's death; but on his death-bed he wrote her a letter telling her——'

'That the child was not her own!' exclaimed Mrs. Walsingham. 'That must have hit her hard.'

'It did, poor girl. She has not yet recovered the blow, and I fear never will. What I most dread is her sinking back into the state in which she was the winter before last.'

'Where is Sir Cyprian Davenant?' asked Mrs. Walsingham, somewhat irrelevantly.

'At the other end of the world, I suppose. I believe he started for Africa some time last autumn.'

'Was there not some kind of early attachment

between him and Mrs. Sinclair? Pardon me for asking such a question.'

'Yes, I believe Davenant would have proposed for Constance if his circumstances had permitted him to hope for my consent?'

'Poor fellow! And he carried his broken heart to Africa; and came back to find fortune waiting for him, and your daughter married. Do you not think if he were to return now Mrs. Sinclair might be consoled for the loss of her child by reunion with the lover of her girlhood?'

'I doubt if anything would reconcile her to the loss of the little girl. Her affection for that child was an infatuation.

A pair of picturesque Italians began a duet by Verdi, and the conversation between Mrs. Walsingham and Lord Clanyarde went no further. He did not make any offer of bringing Constance to the lady's receptions; for the memory for that old alliance between Gilbert Sinclair and Mrs. Walsingham hung like a cloud over her reputation. No one had any specific charge to bring against her; but it was remembered that Sinclair had been her devoted

slave for a long time, and had ended his slavery by marrying somebody else.

'She's a charming woman, you know,' said Lord Clanyarde to the friend who had presented him to Mrs. Walsingham, 'but I feel a kind of awkwardness about asking her to call upon my daughter. You see I don't exactly understand her relations with poor Sinclair.'

Fortunately Mrs. Walsingham made no suggestion about calling on Mrs. Sinclair. She welcomed Lord Clanyarde graciously whenever he chose to go to her Saturday evenings. He heard the best music, met the nicest people, eat Neapolitan ices in cool, dimly-lighted rooms, and admired the fading beauties of the hostess. She reminded him of an autumn afternoon. The same rich glow of colour, the same prophecy of coming decay.

As the weeks went round Constance showed no improvement in health or spirits. Pride was making a sorry struggle in that broken heart. She would not go back to England and the spurious Christabel, though her heart yearned towards that guiltless impostor. She would not suffer another woman's

child to hold the place of her lost darling, no, not even though that strange child had made itself dearer to her than life.

Mrs. Sinclair's doctor informed Lord Clanyarde that Rome was getting too warm for his patient, whereupon that anxious parent was fain to tear himself away from the pleasures of the seven-hilled city and those delightful evenings at Mrs. Walsingham's.

'Our medical man threatens me with typhoid fever and all manner of horrors if I keep my daughter here any longer,' he said; 'so we start for the Upper Engadine almost immediately. You will not stay much longer in Rome, I suppose.'

'I don't know,' answered Mrs. Walsingham, carelessly; 'the place suits me better than any other. I am tired to death of London and Paris. There is some pleasure in life here: and I should like to be buried in the cemetery where Keats lies.'

'Yes, it's a nice place to be buried in, if one must be buried at all; but that's rather a gloomy consideration. I should strongly advise you to spend the summer in a healthier climate, and leave the burial question to chance.'

'Oh, I dare say I shall soon get tired of Rome. I always get tired of places before I have been very long in them; and if the artists go away I shall go too.'

Lord Clanyarde and his daughter left at the end of the week. There were fever cases talked of already, and all the American tourists had fled. Lord Clanyarde felt he was not getting away an hour too soon. They dawdled about among Swiss mountains, living a life of rustic simplicity that was probably beneficial to Constance, but somewhat painful to Lord Clanyarde. At the beginning of July they had established themselves at a lonely little village in the shadow of white solemn mountains, and here Constance felt as if she had passed beyond the region of actual life into a state of repose, a kind of painless purgatory. She had done with the world, and worldly interests and affections. Even the little stranger's heart must have been weaned from her by this time.

Lord Clanyarde saw the gradual decay of his daughter's strength, and trembled for the issue. She had grown dearer to him in this time of close com-

panionship than she had ever been since the far off days when she was little Connie, the youngest and loveliest of his daughters. He told himself that unless something occurred to rouse her from this dull apathy, this placid calm which looked like the forerunner of death's frozen stillness, there was every reason for fear, and but little ground for hope.

Lord Clanyarde prayed more earnestly than he had ever done before in his self-indulgent life, and it seemed to him by-and-by, that Providence had heard his cry for help.

One morning there came a letter from Rome which startled father and daughter alike. It was from Mrs. Walsingham, written in a tremulous hand, and addressed to Lord Clanyarde.

'They tell me I am dying, and the near approach of death has melted the ice about my heart. I have been a very wicked woman, and now conscience urges me to make you what poor reparation I can for a most cruel and treacherous revenge—not upon the man who wronged me, but upon the innocent girl for whose sake I was abandoned.

'I have deeply injured your daughter, Lord Clan-

yarde, and I meant to carry the secret of that wrong to the grave—to leave her desolate and childless to the end. But the long lonely nights—the pain and weariness of decay—the dreary seclusion from the busy outer world—these have done their work. Conscience, which had been deadened by anger and revenge, slowly awakened, and there came a longing for atonement. I can never undo what I have done. I can never give your daughter back the years that have been darkened by sorrow—her wasted tears—her vain regrets. But I may do something. Let her come to me—let her stand beside my death-bed, and I will whisper the story of my crime into her ear. I will not write it. She must come quickly if she wishes to hear what I have to tell, for death stares me in the face, and this letter may be long reaching you. Every day drifts me further down the dark river. How swiftly it rushes in the dreary night-watches. I sometimes fancy I hear the ripple of the tide, and the hollow moan of the great ocean that lies before me—the unknown sea of death and eternity.'

Here came a broken sentence, which Lord Clanyarde could not decipher; and it seemed to him that

the writer's mind had wandered, towards the close of the letter. There was no signature, but he knew the handwriting, and Mrs. Walsingham's address was stamped on the paper.

The letter had been more than a week on the road, and was re-addressed from the hotel where Lord Clanyarde and his daughter had stayed at the beginning of their tour.

'It's a curious business,' said Lord Clanyarde, doubtfully, after he had given Constance the letter. 'I believe her mind is affected, poor soul; and I really don't think you ought to go. Who can tell what she may say in her ravings? and not a vestige of truth in it, perhaps.'

He thought Mrs. Walsingham's death-bed confession might concern her relations with Gilbert Sinclair, and that it would be better for Constance to hear nothing the unhappy lady could tell.

'This letter bears the stamp of truth,' said Constance, firmly. 'I shall go, papa. Pray get a carriage, and let us start as quickly as possible.'

'But, my love, consider the unhealthiness of Rome at this time of year. We might as well go

and live in a fever hospital. The Pontine Marshes, you know, steaming with malaria. We should be digging our own graves.'

'You need not go there unless you like, papa, but I shall not lose an hour. She has something to confess —some wrong done me—something about Christabel, perhaps,' cried Constance, tremulous with excitement

'My dear girl, be calm; what can this lady know about Christabel?'

'I don't know, but I must hear what she has to tell. Wasted tears—vain regrets. That must mean that I have grieved needlessly. O, God, does it mean that my darling is still alive?'

'If you go on like this, Constance, you'll be in a burning fever before you get to Rome,' remonstrated Lord Clanyarde.

He saw that the only wise course was to yield to his daughter's wishes, and lost no time in making arrangements for the journey back to Rome. The apathy which had made him so anxious about Constance was quite gone. She was full of eagerness and excitement, and insisted on travelling as quickly as possible, foregoing all rest upon the journey.

They entered Rome in the summer sunset, the city looking beautiful as a dream. The atmosphere was cool and balmy, but Lord Clanyarde looked with a shudder at the silvery mists floating over the valleys, and fancied he saw the malaria fiend grinning at him behind that diaphanous veil. Constance thought of nothing but the purpose for which she had come.

'Tell the man to drive straight to Mrs. Walsingham's, papa,' she said, eagerly.

'But, my love, hadn't he better take us to the hotel? We had nothing but an omelette for breakfast, and a basket of peaches and a cup of chocolate on the road. I'm thoroughly exhausted. We won't stop for an elaborate dinner. A cutlet and a bottle of Bordeaux will be enough.'

'You can leave me at Mrs. Walsingham's and go on to the hotel to dine.'

'Never mind me, my love,' said Lord Clanyarde, resignedly. 'Since you're so anxious, we'll go and see this poor lady first; but a death-bed confession, you know, that must be a long business.'

He gave the direction to the driver, and the man

pulled up his tired horses before one of the stately palaces of the past.

Constance and her father ascended to the first floor. The house was full of shadows at this tranquil evening hour, and the staircase was dimly lighted by a lamp burning before a statue of the Virgin.

An Italian man-servant admitted them to an anteroom, lavishly decorated with pictures and bric-à-brac—a room in which Lord Clanyarde had eaten Neapolitan ices, or sipped coffee on those Saturday evenings which Mrs. Walsingham had made so agreeable to him. He had never seen the room empty before to-night, and it had a singularly desolate look to his fancy in the flickering light of a pair of wax candles that had burned down to the sockets of the Pompeian bronze candlesticks on the velvet-draped mantelpiece.

'How is your mistress?' Lord Clanyarde asked.

The Italian shrugged his shoulders.

'Alas, Excellency! it goes always the same. She still exists, that is all.'

'Tell her Mrs. Sinclair has come from Switzerland in the hope of seeing her.'

The Italian summoned Mrs. Walsingham's maid, who requested Constance to come at once to the sick room. She was expected, the woman said. But she must prepare herself to be shocked by Mrs. Walsingham's appearance. Her end seemed near.

'You had better go to your hotel, papa,' said Constance. 'I may have to stay here a long time. You can come back for me by-and-by.'

On reflection Lord Clanyarde considered this the best arrangement. He really wanted his dinner. Indeed, he had never yet found any crisis in life so solemn as to obliterate that want.

The servant led the way through a suite of reception-rooms to a tall door at the end of a spacious saloon. This opened into Mrs. Walsingham's bedroom, which was the last room on this side of the house; a noble chamber, with windows looking two ways—one towards the distant hills, the other over the stately roofs and temples of the city. Both windows were wide open, and there was no light in the room save the rosy glow of sunset. The bed was in an alcove, voluminously draped with amber damask and Roman lace. Mrs. Walsingham was in a sitting

position, propped up with pillows, facing the sunglow beyond the purple hills.

There was a second door opening on to the staircase, and as Constance entered some one—a man—left the room by this door. She supposed that this person must be one of Mrs. Walsingham's medical attendants. The doctors were hovering about her no doubt in these last hours.

'You have come,' gasped the dying woman; 'thank God. You can go, Morris,' to the maid; 'I will ring if I want you. Come here, Mrs. Sinclair. Sit down by my side. There is no time to lose. My breath fails me very often. You must excuse—be patient.'

'Pray do not distress yourself,' said Constance, seating herself in the chair beside the bed, 'I can stay as long as you like.'

'How gently you speak to me! But you don't know! You will look at me differently presently—not with those compassionate eyes. I am an awful spectacle, am I not?—living death! Would you believe that I was once a beauty? Sant painted my portrait, when we were both at our best——' with a bitter little laugh.

'I have not lost an hour in coming to you,' said Constance. 'If you have done me a wrong that you can by any means repair, pray do not lose time.'

'Death is waiting at my door. Yes, I must be quick. But it is so horrible to talk of. It was such mean, low treachery. Not a great revenge ;—a pitiful, paltry act of spitefulness. Oh, if you knew how I loved Gilbert Sinclair, how firmly I believed in his love! Yes, and he was fond of me, until the luckless day you crossed his path and stole his heart from me.'

'I never knew——' faltered Constance.

'No, you wronged me ignorantly, but that did not make my loss lighter to bear. I hated you for it. Yes, I measured my hatred for you by my love for him. Life was intolerable to me without him, and one day I vowed that I would make your life intolerable to you. I was told that you were making an idol of your child, that your happiness was bound up in that baby's existence, and I resolved that the child should be taken from you——'

'Wretch!' cried Constance, starting up in sudden horror. 'You were there—at Schönesthal—you pushed her down the slope—it was not accident——'

'No, no. I was not quite so bad as that—not capable of taking that sweet young life. To take her from you, that was enough. To make your days miserable—to make you drink the cup of tears, as I had done—because of you. *That* was my end and aim. I found a willing tool in your French nurse-maid, a skilful coadjutor in James Wyatt. Everything was well planned. The girl had learned to swim the year before at Ostend, and was not afraid to plunge into the river when she saw some one coming. This gave a look of reality to the business. I met Melanie Duport at the ruins that September morning, and took your baby from her. I carried her away in my own arms to the place where a carriage was waiting for me, and drove straight to Baden, and from Baden travelled as fast as I could to Brussels, keeping the baby in my own charge all the while.'

'She was not drowned, then. Thank God—thank God!' cried Constance, sinking on her knees beside the bed, and lifting up her heart in praise and thanksgiving. Of Mrs. Walsingham's guilt—of the sorrow she had endured—she hardly thought in this moment of delight.

'Where is she—my darling, my angel? What have you done with her? Where have you hidden her all this time?'

A wan smile crept over the ashen face of the dying sinner.

'We are strange creatures, we women—mysteries even to ourselves,' she said. 'I took your child away from you; and, hearing you were dying broken-hearted, gave her back to you. Your old lover pleaded strongly. I gave the little one into Sir Cyprian Davenant's keeping. I know no more.'

'Then I was not deceived. My Christabel! It was my Christabel they brought back to me! The instinct of a mother's heart was not a delusion and a snare.'

'Can you pity—pardon?' faltered Mrs. Walsingham.

'Yes, I forgive you for all—for months of blank, hopeless grief—all—because of what you have told me to-night. If you had taken this secret to the grave—if I had never known—I should have gone on steeling my heart against my darling—I should have thrust her from me—left her motherless in

this cruel world, and thought that I was doing my duty. Yes, I forgive. You have wronged me cruelly. And it was heartless—treacherous—abominable—what you did at Schönesthal. But I forgive you all for the sake of this blessed moment. May God pardon and pity you, as I do!'

'You are an angel,' sighed Mrs. Walsingham, stretching out a feeble hand, which Constance pressed tenderly in both her own.

Death is a great healer of bygone wrongs.

'And will you forgive the friend who brought you your own child, believing that he was bringing you a stranger, and who experimentalized with your maternal love, in the hope of winning you from the grave?'

'You mean Sir Cyprian Davenant?' said Constance.

'Yes.'

'I felt very angry with him when my father told me what he had done, but I have felt since that all he did was done out of affection for an old friend. I have nothing to forgive.'

'I am glad to hear you say that. Sir Cyprian has returned from Africa, after a successful expedition. He is in Rome.'

Constance's pale cheek grew a shade paler.

'He is in Rome, and has paid me many visits in this sick room. He has talked to me of your gentleness—your divine compassion. But for that I do not think I should ever have had the courage to send for you——'

'I thank him with all my heart,' exclaimed Constance.

'Let your lips thank him too,' said Mrs. Walsingham, touching the spring bell on the little table by her side.

She struck the bell three times, and at the third chime the door opened and Cyprian Davenant came in. It was he who had withdrawn quietly at Mrs. Sinclair's entrance, and whom she had mistaken for the doctor.

'She has forgiven all,' said Mrs. Walsingham. 'You were right when you called her an angel. And now let me do one good thing on my death-bed. Let me be sure that the rest of her life will be bright and happy, that there will be a strong arm and a true heart between her and sorrow. It will help to lift the burden from my conscience if I can be sure of that.'

Constance spoke not a word. She stood before her first lover blushing like a schoolgirl. She dared not lift her eyes to his face.

Happily there was little need of words.

Cyprian put his arm round the slender figure, in its dismal black dress, and drew the love of years to his breast.

'God has been very good to us, my darling,' he said. 'May He never part us any more! I think He meant us to live and die together.'

Constance did not question this assertion. Her heart mutely echoed her lover's words.

* * * * * *

In the early spring of the following year Davenant Park awoke like the palace of the Sleeping Beauty, and the comfortable old servants, who had grown fat and sleek during their period of comparative idleness rejoiced and made merry at the coming home of their master. They had known him from his boyhood, and to them this raising up of the old family to more than its former prosperity was like a personal elevation. Even the neighbouring villages had their share in the gladness, and there were more bonfires and

triumphal arches between the railway station and the park gates on the evening of Sir Cyprian's return with his beautiful wife, Lord Clanyarde's daughter, than had ever been seen before by the oldest inhabitant.

Baby Christabel was waiting to welcome them on the threshold of the old oak-panelled hall; and Martha Briggs, resplendent in a new silk gown, declared that this was the happiest day of her life, an assertion which Luke Gibson, the head gamekeeper, resented as a personal affront.

'Bar one, Patty,' he remonstrated. 'I should think your own wedding-day ought to be still happier when it comes.'

'No, it won't,' cried Martha, decidedly; 'and I think you ought to know, Jim, that I never would have given my consent to get married if my mistress hadn't——'

'Set you the example,' cried Luke, with a guffaw. 'And a very good example it is, too. Sir Cyprian has promised me the new lodge at the south gate—five rooms and a scullery. That's the missus's doing, I'll be bound!'

THE END.

IN GREAT WATERS.

IN GREAT WATERS.

THERE were two of them—Jeanne and Marie, sisters, —both pretty girls, but the beauty of the younger had a tender spiritual grace that went straight to the heart, and charmed more deeply than the richer bloom of the elder. This sweeter, more bewitching of the two was Marie. They were mere peasants, the daughters of Jean Holbert, a storm-beaten old fisherman, who lived on the outskirts of Nercy, a small sea-coast town in Normandy. Jeanne was a slim, dark-eyed girl of two-and-twenty. Marie was pale, with soft hazel eyes and chestnut hair, and only just eighteen. They were very fond of each other, and worked together at lace-making, which they had been taught by the kind sisters of a convent, whose sugar-loaf towers rose in the back ground of the

little town. The house had been a nobleman's *château* once, had been a good deal knocked about during the first Revolution, and had rather a dilapidated air, but was a pleasant feature of the homely scene for all that. The sisters had taught these girls a good deal besides lace-making. They could read and write well, and were altogether in advance of the peasant class.

It would have been strange if between two pretty girls there had not been at least one lover. There was: a neighbour's son, one Henri Latouche, the eldest of a numerous hard-working family, a tall broad-shouldered fellow of eight-and-twenty, with frank blue eyes and a pleasant smile; a man who lived by the same perilous trade as that of Jean Holbert, reaping the uncertain harvest of the sea. The sisters had many a mournful day and evening when those two were out upon the wide waters, and the driving rain and wind beat against the narrow panes of their window. A hard life, and a hazardous one, and a trade that brought in so little—just enough to sustain existence in the simple household.

Poor as they were, however, there was nothing sordid or miserable in their poverty. The two girls were capital managers. The poor mother, a good hard-working soul, who now slept the sleep of the righteous in the quiet little cemetery just outside the town, had taught them all the useful domestic arts. They were bright, industrious young creatures; and the poor little weather-beaten cottage was the very pink of cleanliness. The low-ceiled room, half kitchen, half parlour, with a great wooden bedstead like a family tomb in a dark corner, shone and sparkled with its few brasses and coppers, its modest show of crockery, neatly arranged on the numerous shelves of the cupboard, its gay-looking chintz window-curtain, and comfortable arm-chair, where the dear old father sat on those happy nights when he was not out at sea.

On such evenings as these Henri Latouche was apt to drop in, and was always made welcome by the old man. The girls would go on with their work—the little household could scarcely have held together so comfortably without the profit from that lace-work—while Henri read a two-days-old newspaper

to them in his fresh young voice, or told them any small fragments of news he had picked up in the town: how the widow Bonnechose was going to marry again, though her last husband had been dead only fifteen months; how Louis Delmont's pretty fair-haired child had strayed away and been lost that afternoon, and only recovered at sunset, when the mother had grown well-nigh distracted with fear. Such homely scraps of gossip interested the old fisherman and his daughters; and the news in the Rouen paper was something to be heard with open eyes and eager curiosity.

One bright, calm evening, late in April, Jeanne sat alone in the little cottage. Marie had gone out for a walk, to carry some lace to the *château* on the side of the hill, where the girls had a liberal patroness in Mademoiselle Renée, only daughter and heiress of the Comte de Marsac, the great man of the neighbourhood. There was no fishing to-night; Jean Holbert had strolled into the town, tempted by the fine weather, to have a chat with some of his old comrades; and Henri—well, Jeanne did not know where Henri was—in the town also perhaps, with her

father. He must needs have been occupied, or he would most likely have looked in at the cottage, Jeanne thought.

They had been brought up together, those two, almost like brother and sister. When Henri was a great hulking boy of sixteen, and Jeanne a smart little damsel of ten, she had taught him to write; and it was a pleasant sight to see the big awkward boy submitting himself to the teaching of the little eager dark-eyed girl, and laughing heartily at his own stupidity. It was a difficult business, but pupil and teacher had persevered gallantly. Henri owed it to Jeanne that he was a tolerable penman, owed it to her also that he read as well as he did; for it was she who had made him improve his rudimentary knowledge of his own language in its printed form.

She was thinking of him this evening as she sat by the open window, working busily in the fading light, considering the waste of her eyesight a lesser evil than the consumption of candles. She was thinking how brave and good Henri was, how kind to her father, how frank and truthful, how infinitely

superior to any other young man in the place; she was thinking of him with a touch of sadness, for it seemed to her that there had been a sort of distant feeling between them of late, though he came so often, and was so friendly. She could scarcely tell what the change was. But the old affectionate familiarity, the loving confidence of those unforgotten days when she had guided the clumsy fingers along the lines of the copy book, had gone for ever. It was not that Henri and she had quarrelled; no angry word had ever passed between them; but there was a change, and Jeanne Holbert felt it.

He would scarcely come to-night, she said to herself as she laid aside her work. It was growing late. She went to the open door, and looked down the road. No, there was no sign of Henri.

There was a faint yellow light still lingering low in the west, and high up in the clear blue sky a few stars were glimmering—a lovely night, with a perfect calm that had a saddening influence on the heart. Jeanne felt this as she stood at the cottage door watching.

She was not watching for the chance of Henri's coming, but for her sister, who was sure to return

presently. Marie came round the bend in the road in a few minutes—not alone. How well Jeanne knew the tall broad-shouldered figure by her side!

Her heart beat a little faster—she was scarcely conscious of it herself; but of late, since that widening of the distance between them, Henri's coming had always moved her thus.

They were quite silent as they came towards the cottage door. There was none of the accustomed talk or laughter; and Marie was very pale. Henri would not come in; he could not wait to see Jean Holbert; he only stopped to shake hands with Jeanne, and then wished the two girls good night, and walked quickly away.

Marie sat down upon a chair near the door, and took off her little shawl, and began to fold it with extreme precision. The evening light shone full upon her delicate face. There was something the matter—Jeanne could see that.

'Mademoiselle Renée was so kind—so kind,' the girl, said in a quick nervous way; 'and she likes the lace very much. We are to make some more of the same pattern—half a dozen yards. And I saw the

gentleman Mademoiselle is to marry—such a handsome man! They will be a fine couple, won't they, Jeanne?'

'Yes, I suppose so,' Jeanne answered, absently. 'I thought you were going to the *château* alone, Marie. How came Henri to be with you?'

Marie bent over the shawl, which she had been folding and smoothing out all this time. It was only a little bit of a shawl to require so much folding.

'Well, you see, Jeanne, I was talking of going to the *château* when Henri was here last night; and as he had nothing to do this evening, there he was on the road, just beyond here, waiting to walk with me. He said it was rather a lonely walk for me, and I oughtn't to go by myself.'

'He was very kind,' Jeanne answered, in a voice that sounded cold and strange to her sister; 'but I don't think that I am very careless about your safety, or that I would let you go if there was any danger in the road. It isn't such a new thing for you to go alone either, Marie.'

The girl blushed, and a shy smile came into her face as she looked up at her sister.

'Well, Jeanne, I suppose the real truth was, Henri wanted to walk with me.'

'I suppose so,' the other answered, in the same constrained tone.

She was standing by the open window, with her elbow resting on the broad wooden ledge, looking out at the darkening sky. The two girls could scarcely see each other's faces in the dusky room, where there was only the faint glow of the tiny wood fire.

'Jeanne, would you be very much surprised if I were to tell you something?' Marie asked, still very shyly.

'That depends upon what it is.'

'You like Henri Latouche, don't you?'

'Like him! I have known him all my life.'

'That's no answer, Jeanne. Tell me if you like him.'

'Yes.'

'Because—because he wants me to marry him, dear; and I shouldn't care to marry any one you didn't like.'

There was a brief silence before Jeanne spoke.

'I don't know about that,' she said at last; 'I

don't think my liking can matter to you much, if you love him yourself.'

'Oh, of course *I* like him,' Marie answered, rather carelessly, as if it were not a matter of very much importance. 'He's such a good fellow.'

'He *is* a good fellow.'

'So good-natured and good-tempered, and would let one do what one liked. It's rather funny to think of him as my husband though, isn't it, Jeanne? I have always felt as if he were my big brother.'

'Then you have promised to marry him, Marie?'

'Well, yes. He teased me so, I was obliged to promise at last; and he really is such a good fellow.'

Jeanne took a candle from the mantelpiece, and knelt down on the hearth to light it. Then she crossed the little room with the candle in her hand, and held it before her sister's face, looking at her very earnestly.

'I want to see if you are serious, Marie,' she said gently. 'Marriage is such a solemn thing, and you speak of it so lightly.'

'My dearest Jeanne, but really I don't see why I should be so very serious. Of course I like him very

much—he is such a dear good fellow : and I am to be his wife instead of his little sister, that's all. It won't make so much difference. Do you know, Jeanne, that he has actually saved money? and he says he will take that cottage looking towards the sea, with a fig tree against the wall, and a wooden balcony to the upper window, the cottage old Dame Margot lived in so long—quite a *château* in its way.'

Jeanne put the candle on the table, and took up her work with that grave preoccupied air which she had at times—a manner that always puzzled her sister.

'You might wish me joy, Jeanne. You're so silent. It seems almost unkind,' Marie said, reproachfully.

Jeanne bent low over her work as she answered,—

'I think you ought to know that I wish for your happiness, Marie,' she said quietly; 'but you've taken me by surprise. I didn't think you cared for Henri.'

'Why, of course, I didn't care for him—except as a brother—until to-night. But he pleaded so,

Jeanne. If I'd been a lady, he couldn't have been more humble—and he is such a dear good fellow.'

She always came back to this point, as if it were an unanswerable argument.

'If you love him, Marie—if you are sure you love him—that's enough. What could I wish more than that—what can I wish for in this world so much as your happiness? You remember what I promised our mother when she was dying: that, come what might, I would always make your happiness my first care.'

'And I'm sure you've kept your word, you dear unselfish Jeanne. You've been a second mother to me, though there's only four years' difference between us.'

The younger girl came and knelt at her sister's feet, resting her folded arms upon Jeanne's knees, and looking up at her with that bewitching smile of hers.

'Tell me that you are pleased, dear,' she said; 'I cannot be happy without that.'

'I am pleased with anything that can secure your happiness, Marie; but I want to be quite

sure of that, and it seems so sudden—this engagement between you and Henri.'

'Sudden? Bless you, Jeanne, he's been in love with me ever since I was as high as that!' answered Marie, putting her hand about two feet from the floor, and with a triumphant look in her bright face.

It was her first victory over the vassal man, and she was proud of her power. The time came when it seemed to her a very poor conquest, scarcely worth thinking of; but just now she felt a pleasant sense of her own importance, a childish delight in the notion that this stalwart young fisherman was her slave.

So it was all settled. Jean Holbert came in from the town presently, and was told the great news—in a pretty, faltering, broken way by Marie, in a few straightforward sentences by Jeanne. He was pleased at the tidings, and quite ready to give his consent.

'I felt pretty sure that he was in love with one of you,' he said cheerily, 'but I didn't trouble my poor old head to find out which. It would all come

out in time, I knew. And so it's Marie, is it?—my little Marie! Why, you're scarcely more than a child, little one. The marriage mustn't be yet awhile.'

'I'm sure I'm in no hurry, father. But there's old widow Margot's cottage to let—you know, father; the pretty one facing the sea, with a wooden balcony, —and perhaps some one else will take it if we're not married soon.'

'There are plenty of cottages besides that, pretty one, and Henri could build you a balcony. You needn't be in a hurry to leave your poor old father. —The place would seem dull without her wouldn't it, Jeanne?'

'Very dull.'

'Of course it would. There mustn't be any talk of this marriage for a year at least. Not for two years if I had my way.'

'You must settle that with Henri, father,' the girl answered, standing on tiptoe to kiss him. '*I* don't want to leave you.'

They were engaged, therefore; but the marriage was not to be yet awhile. Everything went on

just the same as usual. In all their little world there seemed no change, except to one person, and that person was Jeanne. For her the change was a great and bitter one. She knew now that she had loved Henri Latouche all her life.

However heavy her burden might be, she bore it, and made no sign. From her earliest childhood hers had been a life of care and toil and thought for others. It did not seem to her a settled thing that she was to be happy and win the prize she longed for, as it is apt to seem to the impetuous heart of youth. She had loved the companion of her childhood, and there had been a time when she fancied her love returned. He had chosen otherwise, and she was able to resign him to her sister without one rebellious murmur against Providence. But there was one thing she could not do: she could not feel sure that Marie loved him.

The girl was very young and light-hearted. It was only natural, perhaps, that she should take life carelessly, that she should not feel very seriously even upon the subject of her betrothal; but Jeanne found this indifference a hard thing to understand.

Sometimes, when Henri Latouche was out fishing on stormy days, the elder sister would sit and watch the face of the younger wonderingly. He who should have been all the world to her was in peril, and she sat singing at her work. If Jeanne spoke of him, or called her attention to the cruel wind rattling the little casement, a faint cloud of trouble would pass over her face, but that was all. The work and the song went on again afterwards, or perhaps some idle gossip about Mademoiselle de Marsac, who wore the loveliest white muslin dresses trimmed with lace and ribbon, or silks that were rich enough to stand alone.

'She ought to be very happy, oughtn't she, Jeanne?' Marie said sometimes, with a sigh. 'She has an Arab horse that the Count bought her. One of the grooms showed him to me the other day, when I had been to the kitchen to see Justine and came out by the stables. A beautiful gray, with a coat that shines like satin. And she has such jewels! —more than you could reckon, Justine told me. And this Monsieur de Lutrin whom she is going to marry is always bringing her something beauti-

ful from Paris. What a fine thing it is to be an heiress!'

The *château* was Marie Holbert's one glimpse of the great world. It seemed to her that in all France, in all the universe, there could be no habitation more splendid than that old white-walled Norman mansion, with its tall sugar-loaf towers, the broad terraces, where roses and geraniums bloomed in perennial beauty, and where moss-grown statues of Apollo and Diana, Ceres and Pan, slowly mouldered to decay; the spacious rooms, with their faded tapestries, and tarnished gilding, and rococo furniture, and polished floors, with a square of rich Persian carpet here and there, like some tropical flowery islet in a shining brown sea. It was the only great house the fisherman's daughter had ever seen, and there was something in the aspect of the place that took her breath away. It was all so different from her own surroundings. To enter it was to find oneself in quite another world. Mademoiselle Renée's tall, stately figure, with that background of lofty saloon, seemed to her like the picture of a fairy princess in an enchanted palace.

This young lady was very kind to her, paying her promptly for her work, and giving her little presents now and then; sometimes detaining her at the château for an hour or so, sometimes inviting her to share a pleasant afternoon meal of coffee and fruit and cakes with her own maid Justine, in a pretty circular room in one of the towers where the maid sat and worked. Marie thought it was a happy thing to be Justine, and live always in that splendid château. It made her own life seem ruder and commoner to her when she went home after these little festivals. Her evening walk with Henri Latouche wearied her. Sometimes, as they came home between the orchard hedgerows in the twilight, they saw the lights shining in the windows of the château on the hill, and Marie used to wonder what Mademoiselle was doing in the great saloon, with her weak, indulgent old father, and the fragile invalid mother, who seldom left her sofa, and the noble, handsome young lover. Perhaps Mademoiselle was quite as dull as Marie with *her* lover, could the peasant girl have only known the truth. Faded tapestry and dim yellow satin

hangings—nay, even tarnished ormolu and rare old cabinets of buhl and marqueterie—do not create happiness; and, sooth to say, life at the *château* was somewhat monotonous. Mamma had her chronic maladies, of which she thought more than of her daughter; papa his perpetual *Journal des Débats* and snuff-box. There were very few visitors. It was a life that went on repeating itself from year to year —calm, eventless, and stupid.

Unfortunately, Marie had no power to see this side of the picture. Mademoiselle de Marsac's surroundings dazzled her; and Mademoiselle de Marsac's lover—oh, how different he was from Henri Latouche, with his big clumsy hands, his honest weather-beaten face, and his rough peasant clothes, which always smelt of the sea!

One sultry afternoon in the middle of July, when Marie Holbert and Henri Latouche had been betrothed just three months, the girl went upon one of her accustomed visits to the *château*. It was rather an oppressive day, with a feverish heat in the atmosphere and a hint of a coming thunder-storm. The roses on the terrace seemed to loll

their heads heavily. The *château* itself had a drowsy look— the Venetian shutters closed, a muslin curtain here and there flapping faintly with every feeble sigh of the south-west wind.

Mademoiselle de Marsac was not visible; she had a headache, and was lying down in her own room, Justine told Marie Holbert. The two girls loitered a little in the shady hall to gossip, and then Marie walked slowly away from the cool dark *château* into the shadowless gardens. There was little sunshine this afternoon—a lurid glow rather, which seemed like the sweltering heat of a furnace. There was a way across the gardens to a small wooden door opening into the high road, which saved some distance, and Justine had told Marie she could go by this way. It was a day upon which any one would be glad to shorten a journey, if by ever so little.

Marie Holbert had never seen so much of the gardens before, often as she had been to the *château*, but she knew the door in the thick white wall very well. She had looked at it often from the outside as she mounted the hill, and had wondered

idly whether it was ever used. She was quite overpowered by the idea of exploring so much of this earthly paradise alone.

There was not very much to see in the *château* gardens, after all, beautiful as they appeared to Marie. It was only a repetition of geometrical flower-beds and sunburnt grass, and here and there a dilapidated statue. There were few trees; none of the cool shadowy beauties, the verdant mysteries of an English garden. With a few headstones and monuments scattered about, the sunny slope would have made an excellent cemetery.

Halfway between the *château* and the point to which she was going, Marie came to a circle of scarlet geraniums and a great marble basin which had once been a fountain. There was no sparkling jet of water now leaping gaily upward in the sunshine; only the chipped old basin, discoloured with damp and moss. But Marie gave a little start on approaching it; for on the edge of the basin there sat a gentleman smoking, in the laziest attitude possible, with one leg stretched along the broad marble border, and the other knee raised to make

a support for his elbow. It was Monsieur de Lutrin —Hector de Lutrin, the affianced of Mademoiselle.

He, too, gave a little start as Marie came near, and seemed to come to life all at once, as it were, changing his lazy attitude for one of attention.

'Great Heaven!' he muttered to himself, 'it is the little lace-girl! She comes expressly to amuse me.'

He rose and came forward to meet the little lace-girl, with his half-consumed cigar held daintily between his slim fingers. He was a fragile-looking young man, whose strong points were his hands and feet and a languid patrician air. He was not really handsome. His pale face and light grey eyes had a faded look; but his dark-brown moustache, and a certain grace of costume and manner, relieved his insipidity of feature and complexion.

He was the first gentleman, except the old Comte de Marsac, who had ever spoken to Marie Holbert, and he seemed to her a demigod.

'You have had a useless journey to the *château* this intolerable day, I fear, Mademoiselle,' he said. 'Mademoiselle Renée is ill.'

'I am so sorry!' Marie faltered, blushing and confused.

To be spoken to by any stranger was a bewildering thing; but by the betrothed of Mademoiselle —this adorable young man!

'It is not a matter of moment, happily,' he replied, lightly, giving the half-smoked cigar a little wave in the air. 'She has the *migraine*—this abominable weather, no doubt. Look what a leaden hue the sky has yonder. We are going to have a thunderstorm. Had you not better go back to the house?'

'Oh, no, Monsieur. You are very good, but I shall be wanted at home.'

'Foolish child! If you attempt to go home, you will be caught in the storm. Are you not afraid of thunder and lightning?'

'No, Monsieur, not afraid. I don't like to be out in the lightning; but—but I think there will be time for me to get home before it begins.'

'You are wrong, my little one. See, there is no mistaking that leaden cloud.'

'Indeed, Monsieur, I must go straight home at any hazard.'

'Very well. If you are obstinate, you must go; but remember I have warned you. However, I'll open the gate for you, and then you had better run home as fast as you can.'

He turned and walked with her towards the gate,—she shy and troubled by so much politeness, he with that easy air which was his chief grace; but before they reached the gate great raindrops came splashing down, and then a blinding shower, a perfect sheet of water.

'We're in for it!' exclaimed Monsieur de Lutrin. 'It's no use trying to go back to the *château*—we should be drowned before we could get there; but there's a tool house a few paces from here, where we can take shelter. Come, Mademoiselle.'

He led the half-bewildered girl along a narrow sandy path, past the door in the wall, to a rustic building sacred to the gardeners. The door was luckily open, and they went in, out of a very deluge. It was a roomy but darksome shed, containing gardening implements of all kinds, and a good deal of litter in the way of seeds and herbs, laid aside to dry. There was only one little window

looking upon the broad treeless garden, where flowers and shrubs were being beaten to the ground under the furious rain.

'It served me right,' Marie said, remorsefully. 'My sister begged me not to come to-day.'

'Very sensible advice of your sister's,' said Hector de Lutrin; 'but I am glad you did not take it.'

The girl was going to ask him why, but a look in his eyes checked her—a look that she had never met in the eyes of her lover, an expression that brought a vivid blush to her cheeks, and yet was not altogether displeasing, it was a look of such unalloyed admiration. Her heart beat a little faster than before, and the long dark lashes drooped over the pretty eyes.

'Because if you had taken your admirable sister's advice, I should have lost a most exquisite pleasure,' he went on, in his slow, languid way.

A blinding flash of lightning gave Marie an excuse for turning her head aside suddenly just at this moment; but the searching gaze of Monsieur de Lutrin's gray eyes was more embarrassing than the lightning.

But Marie recovered herself presently, and made very much the sort of reply that any young woman in society might have given her admirer.

'I don't think there can be much pleasure in being kept a prisoner in such a place as this,' she said.

'That depends upon one's companion. There is some company in which any place is delightful. Do you know, Marie, I have often wished to have a little talk with you, only at the *château* it was not possible. Would you have a very great objection to my cigar, by the way, if I were to light it again? This place has such a damp smell.'

Marie had no objection to the cigar, which Monsieur de Lutrin proceeded to light; but she felt suddenly eager to make her escape. It was very flattering, of course, this attention from Mademoiselle Renée's betrothed, and Marie's heart was flattered by an almost overwhelming sense of gratified vanity; but she knew very well that it was not right—not right either to Mademoiselle Renée or to her own honest weather-beaten lover.

'I don't think it is raining so fast now,' she said; 'I had better make haste home.'

'Silly child! it is raining just as fast as ever. Hark at the thunder. There's an awful crackling noise, just as if it came from the road behind us! And what lightning! You cannot leave this refuge till the storm is over. I am sorry it is not a better place, and I am still more sorry you find it so dismal. For me it is a paradise in little.'

And so he went on, smoking his cigar in that slow, desultory way of his, and paying elaborate compliments to the poor little peasant girl. He had no iniquitous design, no treasonable intentions against the peace of the little lace-girl or his betrothed; he only wanted to amuse himself this dull summer afternoon by a harmless flirtation. The thought of any mischief that might arise from his caprice gave him no trouble. He was not in the habit of perplexing himself upon the subject of other people's feelings. If the little lace-girl permitted herself to be too much impressed by him, that was her look-out. His own conscience found perfect repose in the fact that he meant nothing.

Marie Holbert listened to him. What could she do but listen, with the rain still pouring down, and

the thunderstorm at its worst? She had no excuse for running away; so she stayed and listened to talk which was commonplace enough, but dangerously delightful to her.

He asked her questions about her life, praised the colour of her eyes, told her how much too pretty she was for a life of hard work—as if it were only the ill-favoured of this earth to whom the heritage of toil was given. He said enough to make her thoroughly discontented and unhappy, presently, when the storm was over, and he had escorted her through the garden door and as far as a bend in the hilly road, just above the town, where he left her.

When he was gone, it seemed as if the whole aspect of her life was changed. The thought of the smoky little cottage, to which she was returning, made her shudder; the thought of her lover's evening visit was still more distasteful to her. The poison was subtle, and gave its flavour to everything. How handsome, how charming he was, this elegant Parisian gentleman, who had praised her beauty! Was she really so pretty? Henri Latouche had said very little about her good looks. He had talked of his

love for her, but not of the colour of her eyes. At best he was rather a stupid lover.

She was absent-minded, and had a somewhat melancholy air, that evening when Henri came, and told them the news, and read the paper to the old father in his usual way. She gave him a random answer more than once. Her thoughts were in the rustic shed, with its one little window, against which the rain had beaten so furiously. Henri was puzzled by her manner.

Marie Holbert had occasion to go to the *château* again two days afterwards. It was always she who went to and fro with the lace or any message about it. Jeanne knew that her sister was Mademoiselle de Marsac's favourite, and Jeanne had always so much to do at home. The two girls did all Mademoiselle's plain work, as well as the lace-making; and just now there was a great deal of work on hand for the trousseau. The marriage was to take place in October; and after her marriage, Mademoiselle was to go and live in Paris, for Monsieur de Lutrin could not exist away from Paris. He was rich and idle—an only son, who

had inherited a handsome fortune lately,—and the marriage had been arranged ever so long ago between the two fathers.

There was no fear of a thunderstorm this time. The *château* gardens were all ablaze with sunshine. To-day Mademoiselle Renée was visible. Justine took Marie to her boudoir, where they had a long discussion about the needlework. Marie had half expected to see Monsieur de Lutrin here, turning over loose sheets of music, or teasing Mademoiselle's favourite poodle, after his wont; but he was not in the boudoir to-day.

The talk about the work lasted more than an hour. Renée de Marsac was especially gracious, and insisted that Marie should have a glass of sugared water and a biscuit after her walk; and at parting she said,—

'Be sure you go across the gardens, child, and out by the little door—it is always unlocked,—and that way will save you a quarter of a mile.'

Marie blushed crimson. Could she ever forget that short cut across the garden, and the wonderful adventure that had befallen her? She left the house

in a strange dreamy state. Should she see him again? As she came near the dilapidated fountain, it seemed to her that the earth beneath her feet grew impalpable all at once, as if she had been walking on air.

Yes, there he was, in precisely the same attitude, smoking and gazing listlessly at the horizon, across the blue hill-tops. He looked as if he had never moved since she had first seen him sitting there two days before.

He heard her steps upon the loose gravel, and rose to meet her, throwing the end of his cigar into the empty marble basin. It was only a repetition of their last meeting. His compliments were very much the same—just a little more fervid, perhaps; but that was all. To a woman of the world it would all have seemed insipid and commonplace enough; but it was the first tribute that had ever been paid by a gentleman to Marie Holbert's beauty, and the poor little feeble soul had no power to resist the fascination. He was a gentleman—that was the beginning and end of the charm.

He walked with her to the bend of the road

again, but did not care to go beyond that point, for a few yards farther would have brought them into the town; and, harmless as Monsieur de Lutrin meant his flirtation to be, he did not want to advertise it to all the world of Nercy.

Just as they came to this bend of the road, a slight girlish figure advanced towards them with a firm steady walk that Marie knew very well. She gave a great start, and in her sudden confusion clung to Hector de Lutrin's arm. Not till this moment had she any positive sense of guilt; but the sight of that familiar figure, coming along the road, was like a revelation. What would Jeanne say?

'Why, what ails thee, little one?' asked Monsieur de Lutrin, looking down at the frightened face with an expression of mingled wonder and annoyance in his own. That spasmodic clutch of Marie's had startled him unpleasantly, for he was of a nervous temperament.

'It is my sister Jeanne!' Marie said, with a gasp.

'What then? Thy sister Jeanne will not eat us.'

'Great Heaven! what will she think? She will be so angry! What shall I say?'

Jeanne was quite near them by this time. Monsieur de Lutrin came to a full stop, raised his hat to the highest ceremonial elevation, and made a bow which included the two sisters.

'I have the honour to wish you good day, Mademoiselle,' he said to Marie; and then he strolled slowly back up the hill towards the *château*.

Marie had grown pale to the lips. Never in all her life had she feared any one as she feared her sister Jeanne to-day. For some minutes the two girls walked on in silence; and then Jeanne spoke, in a voice that was very grave—nay, almost stern, but which trembled a little nevertheless.

'How came Monsieur de Lutrin to be with you just now, Marie?' she asked.

'I don't know. It was quite an accident, of course. Mademoiselle told me to come through the garden—to the little door, you know, Jeanne, that opens on the hill; and I happened to meet Monsieur, and he walked with me.'

'Do you think it right, Marie, that a gentleman like that should walk by your side, just as if you were equals?'

'I don't see anything wrong in it.'

'Then why were you so frightened when you saw me coming? I saw you grasp Monsieur's arm as if you had seen a ghost.'

'It was very foolish of me,' Marie answered, in rather a defiant manner. 'There was no reason that I should be frightened.'

'Except that people seldom like to be found out doing wrong. What do you think Henri would say if he had seen you two together?'

'I do not think anything about it, or care anything about it. And I hope that is the end of your lecture, Jeanne.'

She had never defied her sister before; the sister who, for the last six years of her life, had watched and guarded her with a mother's care.

Jeanne said no more. It was not such a great crime, after all, that Marie had been guilty of; but there had been something in the manner of those two that alarmed Jeanne. They had been talking

so confidentially until Marie saw her. It could scarcely be the first time they had talked together. And then Marie's unmistakable terror was such a strange thing.

'Was to-day the first time that Monsieur de Lutrin walked with you?' Jeanne asked by-and-by; but Marie evaded the question, declaring that she would not submit to be lectured. Her heart was beating very fast, half with fear, half with anger, and she felt herself very wicked—almost as if she had given herself over to iniquity.

After this Jeanne took care that Marie should pay no more visits to the *château*. Henceforward it was Jeanne herself who went to carry home work, or to take Mademoiselle de Marsac's orders. But a fine gentleman who had lived the life of Paris was, of course, more than a match for a simple peasant girl; and it generally happened that while Jeanne was up the hill at the *château*, Monsieur de Lutrin dropped in at the cottage, to ask for a cup of cider, and to talk for half an hour or so with Marie.

Opposition gave a zest to the flirtation. If the girl had been thrown constantly in his way he might

have wearied of her before this; but the sister's precautions gave the business the flavour of an intrigue, and Monsieur de Lutrin had found life very monotonous at the *château.*

Jean Holbert's cottage stood on the extreme edge of the town, and a little aloof from the other habitations that were thinly sprinkled along the broad white road; had there been nearer neighbours, those visits of the fine gentleman from the *château* might have created a scandal. They would ultimately have done so as it was, perhaps, had not the course of events taken another turn.

Monsieur de Lutrin had suffered himself to be drifted away from that idea of meaning nothing serious, with which he had begun his flirtation. Marie was so much in earnest. The sweet young face expressed so much more than the poor child was conscious of. Those sweet eyes betrayed so many mysteries of the tender fluttering heart.

She was very wicked, she told herself, with secret agonies of remorse. Hector de Lutrin was Mademoiselle de Marsac's affianced husband, and she loved him; loved him as she had never loved Henri

Latouche. Indeed, she knew but too well now, made sadly wise by this real passion, that she had never loved Henri Latouche at all.

There was a change in her, and a marked one, which Henri perceived and wondered about. She scarcely seemed to live except in those brief half-hours in which Monsieur de Lutrin was with her. The bewildering delight of his presence seemed to absorb all her capacity for emotion. When he was gone, existence became a blank, and she could do nothing but calculate the probabilities as to his next visit. Would he come on Tuesday, on Wednesday, on Thursday? How many hours, how many minutes before she should hear the gracious caressing tones of his voice once more? It was only a common form of the universal fever, a foolish girl's passion for a gentleman lover. Who can tell what fatal end might have come to the story? A sudden and a calamitous end did come to it, but not that which commonly concludes such a record.

Mademoiselle de Marsac's *fête* day was in September, and upon this particular occasion she had a fancy for keeping it after a fashion of her own

Some ten miles from Nercy there was a famous grotto called the Giant's Cave, one of the objects of interest to which all visitors were taken. The place lay quite away from any high road, and was, indeed, almost inaccessible by land; but the trip was pleasant enough by water, and Henri Latouche had done many a profitable day's work in taking people to the Giant's Cave. The coast was wild and rugged between Nercy and the cavern, and the little voyage was not without peril in foul weather; but of course visitors rarely went except in settled weather, and there had been few accidents.

One evening Jeanne came home from the *château* in better spirits than usual. It was the eve of Mademoiselle's *fête* day.

'I have got you a job, Henri,' she said, cheerily; 'Mademoiselle has a friend with her—a lady from Rouen—and she wants to show her the Giant's Cave. She will give you a napoleon if you will take them there to-morrow in your sailing-boat. There will be only the two young ladies and Monsieur de Lutrin.'

This was about twice the payment the young man ordinarily asked for the voyage.

'That's just like you, Jeanne,' he said, 'always thinking of other people. I don't suppose Mademoiselle would have made such a handsome offer if you hadn't put it into her head. I'll take them with pleasure, and I'll make the *Marie Antoinette* as smart as I can for the occasion.'

'Do, Henri. She spoke so kindly. She has often noticed you at church, she says, when you've been there with Marie and me, and she knows you very well by sight. She knows that you and Marie are to be married some day.'

Marie was silent all this time, bending over her work. She had seemed quite absorbed by her needlework lately; indeed, Henri told himself that the change in her manner, that listlessness and abstraction which had so perplexed him, only arose from her being so busy about Mademoiselle de Marsac's trousseau. But Jeanne could have told how little work Marie had really done, in spite of this appearance of industry.

The next day was the 15th of September; a bright morning with a blue sky and a fresh west wind. Marie began the day in very low spirits.

She had not seen Monsieur de Lutrin for more than a week. Happy Mademoiselle Renée, who saw him continually, who would have him by her side all that long autumnal day! She thought of the white-sailed boat dancing gaily over the blue waters, and the affianced lovers sitting side by side. Would he think of her, whose beauty he had praised so often, whom he had pretended even to love? Was it likely that he would think of her? Oh, no! The utter folly of her guilty passion came home to her to-day as it had never done before; but oh, the bitter jealous pangs that rent the weak, erring heart!

Henri looked in at the cottage before he started. Perhaps he wanted to show himself to his betrothed, looking his best in his Sunday clothes, with a new ribbon round his sailor's hat, and his hair brushed to desperation.

'Will you come and look at the boat, Marie?' he said, anxious to get half an hour with his betrothed before the day's work began. 'She's a picture. I've borrowed some cushions, and made all comfortable for Mademoiselle.'

No, Marie did not care to see the boat; and yet, stay; yes, she would come to look at her, if Henri pleased. She hated the boat, she hated Henri; she hated everything and everybody that had a part in this day's festivity.

'What do I care about the boat?' she said, captiously, when they were down at the quay, and she surveyed her lover's preparations; 'I'm not going in her.'

'But you know that I'd take you to the Giant's Cave any day you cared to go, Marie,' said Henri.

'I've seen the Giant's Cave,' she answered, with a little impatient shrug.

While she was standing on the quay, Monsieur de Lutrin and the two ladies came down to the boat. Marie dropped a low curtsey, and stood aside as they passed her. How far away from them she seemed! Mademoiselle Renée gave her a gracious smile, but Monsieur de Lutrin appeared scarcely to see her. It was very hard to bear. That distant look of his cut her to the heart. In after years she always remembered his face as she had seen it then, with its listless indifferent expres-

sion. She watched them get into the boat, and waited for all the pleasant noise and bustle of the start. The last glimpse she had of them showed her the lovers sitting side by side, Mademoiselle talking, and Hector de Lutrin bending down to listen, the boat tossing gaily over the waves. Her own life, and all her own surroundings, seemed odious to her as she went home.

The two girls kept close at their needlework all the morning. The time for the marriage was drawing near, and there was still a good deal to be done. They did not talk much. Marie had grown strangely silent of late, and Jeanne was too busy for conversation. They worked on steadily till noon, and after they had eaten their frugal dinner they began again. It was nearly four o'clock, when the wind rose suddenly and shook the cottage window with sharp gusts that made the two girls look up from their work.

Jeanne's face was very grave.

'Do you know what quarter the wind is in today, Marie?' she asked, anxiously.

'No, indeed; yes, I remember Henri spoke of it this morning. It is in the south-west.'

'Great Heaven! I have heard my father say that it is a dangerous quarter for sailing from the grotto. The south-west wind blows full upon shore. I have heard him say that he has stood upon the hill yonder on a stormy day, and seen the boats driven in upon the shingle.'

Marie grew very pale; but it was not of Henri Latouche she was thinking. It was of that other one who was in the same peril.

'How pale thou art, all in a moment!' said her sister, tenderly. 'There may be no cause for fear, little one. It is not every wind that brings a wreck; and thou knowest thy lover is a good sailor and a strong swimmer. There is little fear for him.'

'Perhaps not,' thought Marie, despairingly, 'but for the other—for the other!'

The work dropped from her lap, and she opened the little window and looked out. Jeanne stooped to pick up the delicate linen and cambric: Jeanne could always think of everything. The dust was blowing in great clouds along the road, the poplars were swaying to-and-fro. A man passed whom Marie

knew, and she asked him what he thought of the weather.

'An ugly afternoon,' he said. 'Is the old father out?'

'Yes, he has gone fishing.'

'I can't say I like the look of the weather; but God is good, Mademoiselle, and your father has been out in many a storm.'

Marie turned to her sister. 'Let us go down to the quay, Jeanne. The *Marie Antoinette* may have come back, and the good father too. Come, Jeanne; we shall hear something at least.'

Jeanne put away the work as neatly as if her mind had been quite at ease. Marie stood at the window watching those swaying poplars, and thinking—not of her father, though she loved him dearly; not of the man she had promised to marry; but of Hector de Lutrin, who for the amusement of an idle hour had perverted her heart.

They went down to the quay. The boat might be in by this time, though Jeanne remembered how Mademoiselle de Marsac had said she meant to spend a long day in the cavern, and among the rocks on

that wild shore, and to return only at dusk. It would not be dusk till seven o'clock.

There was no sign of the *Marie Antoinette*, and the wind was still rising. It was as much as the two girls could do to keep their feet on the rough stone path. The sea, which had been so bright and blue in the morning, was now a murky brown, the waves rolling heavily in with white crests. The roar of the waters was almost deafening. Marie clung helplessly to her sister. She had seen many a storm before to-day, but this seemed to her worse than any she could remember.

There were a good many men and boys upon the quay, looking seaward, and one woman, watching for her husband's return with sad eyes. Jeanne and Marie had been waiting half an hour, when Jean Holbert's boat came in. He at least was safe. The two girls embraced him,—Jeanne with fervour, Marie in a half-absent way. She was thankful to Providence for his safe return, but she could not withdraw her thoughts from that other one.

'Is the *Marie Antoinette* in?' asked the old man, directly he had kissed his children.

'Not yet, father,' Jeanne answered, quietly.

'I don't like that. It's a bad night for coming round by the peak.'

'Henri is such a good sailor,' Jeanne said.

'Ay, ay, child, he's a good sailor, but he's alone with those three; and if the boat capsized, and he tried to save the others, it would be hazardous. It will be hard work sailing in the teeth of this wind.'

Marie shuddered. They had turned and left the quay, and were walking homewards; but the girl clutched her sister's arm and whispered,—

'Don't go home, Jeanne; I can't go home.'

'Father, thy supper is all ready for thee. Marie is too anxious to go home just yet, if thou wilt excuse us.'

'Poor little Marie, thou wert best at home. But as you will, children; only don't stay long. You can do no good by watching the sea.'

The old man went slowly home, the girls returned to the quay. They waited and watched for another half-hour under the dark threatening sky, in which there was only one livid line of light on the edge of the horizon.

'Come, Marie,' Jeanne said at last; 'let us go to the church and pray.'

The church was always open. It was a grand old building, almost large enough for a cathedral, with curious models of ships hanging in the nave and aisles, presented by pious seamen who had escaped great perils; with little chapels here and there, where the shrines were of a somewhat faded splendour; here and there a noble old monument sorely defaced by time and the revolutionary rabble, like the carved oaken doors, upon which maimed and noseless saints and angels testified to the malice of insensate destroyers.

Jean Holbert's daughters went into the church, Marie following her sister almost mechanically. It was growing dark in those shadowy aisles, where a lamp before an altar twinkled faintly here and there, or a little group of lighted candles cast feeble rays upon the pavement. They went into one of the aisles, and knelt down to pray in the shadow of a great granite pillar,—one sister with a calm and holy earnestness, the other with a half-despairing intensity.

'O Lord, save him, spare his life, though I may never see his face again,' she prayed.

She made the same supplication over and over again, and then repeated the Litany of our Lady in a mechanical way, her mind always with the boat and that one who was in peril. The image of Henri Latouche never arose before her. She had no power to think of anything but that one person.

They remained in the church for more than an hour, and then went back to the quay. It was now seven o'clock, and almost dark, but there were no tidings of the *Marie Antoinette.* They waited and waited, listening to the talk of the seafaring men who still loitered about the landing stairs. It was not by any means hopeful talk for them to hear. One man, who knew the sisters very well, tried to give them a little hope, but it was evident that his own ideas about the *Marie Antoinette* were not sanguine.

The girls lingered until the church clock struck eight, and then Jeanne insisted upon going home. Marie had been shivering all the time. It was worse than useless waiting there. She submitted to her

sister's will, too helpless in her misery for resistance, and they walked slowly homeward.

Halfway towards the house Jeanne gave a loud scream.

'Look, Marie!' she cried, hysterically. 'Thank God, thank God! he is safe!'

She pointed to a figure advancing towards them—the stalwart broad-shouldered figure of the young fisherman. It was indeed Henri Latouche. He was close to them by this time; he stretched out his arms to clasp Marie to his breast.

'My darling!' he cried, tenderly, 'I never thought to see thy face again.'

She held him off with extended hands, and an awful look in her eyes.

'Don't touch me,' she said. 'Where is Monsieur de Lutrin?'

Henri stared at her with a bewildered air, and then turned to Jeanne. 'Bring her home,' he said. —'Come, Marie.'

'I will not stir a step. Where is Monsieur de Lutrin?'

'Jeanne, bring her home. There has been an

accident—the boat capsized off the peak; the two young ladies are safe. I swam on shore with them —they are at a farmhouse yonder; and I walked across the fields here. My boat is lost. It has been a sad day's work.'

'Where is Monsieur de Lutrin?'

'He is drowned, Marie. I did my best to save him, but he could not swim. And there were the other two. It was no use. I could not save them all.'

Marie gave a great cry, and fell on the ground at his feet. He lifted her up, and carried her in his arms as easily as if she had been a little child. She was quite unconscious, her head lying on his shoulder.

'Jeanne,' he said, in a husky voice, 'what does this mean?'

'I don't know.'

'What was Monsieur de Lutrin to her, that she should take his death like this?'

'He was nothing to her. He had spoken to her once or twice, that was all.'

They learned more a few days later; for Marie Holbert's swoon was followed by a brain fever, in

which the girl raved about her drowned lover. Henri Latouche discovered how completely her heart had been stolen from him, if it had ever been his.

He bore the blow manfully, though it was a crushing one. He helped to nurse the sick girl through that dismal time, and on her recovery treated her with brotherly tenderness. But he told her gently one day that the bond between them was broken, and that he released her from her promise. She only bowed her head, and said in a low voice, 'You are right, Henri; I could never have loved you as you deserved.'

A few days after this she went to the convent, and told the nuns that she wanted to join their sisterhood. There were no difficulties; her skill in lacemaking would render her a self-supporting member of the community. She said nothing to Jeanne or to her father until all was settled, and she was about to enter upon her novitiate. The old fisherman was too good a Catholic to offer much opposition to her wishes. It was hard to part with her; but she would not be far away, and she would come to see him often, she told him.

Five years after the wreck of the *Marie Antoinette,* Henri Latouche asked Jeanne Holbert to be his wife. The old wound had healed, and he had found out the value of the brave unselfish woman who had loved him from her childhood.

SEBASTIAN.

CHAPTER I.

A FINE GENTLEMAN.

When Sir Jasper Lydford came home from the grand tour, he brought with him, besides a large and various collection of cameos, intaglios, mosaics, and other trumpery palmed upon him by astute foreign traders, two living treasures, of which he was justly proud. The first was Florio Benoni, his Italian valet; the second was Sebastian, his favourite dog—an animal of the true St. Bernard breed, purchased by Sir Jasper at the hospital in the mountains, where he had spent a night with much satisfaction to himself and the monks, whose courtesies he had acknowledged with becoming liberality.

Sir Jasper was fourth baronet of a good old Somersetshire family, and the owner of a fine estate between Porlock and Wiveliscombe. It is just a

century ago since he finished his stately perambulation of Europe in his own coach, and crossed from Antwerp in a clumsy old tub of a vessel, after four years of slow and industrious travel. He was five-and-twenty, and had been his own master ever since he attained his majority; until which happy event he had been under the tutelage of two guardians and the Court of Chancery; his father and mother having been swept off by a malignant fever at their house in Brook Street, when Jasper was still in petticoats. Fever used to walk in high places in those days, as any one may discover who reads Horace Walpole's letters, and marks how often he records the sudden desolation wrought in noble families by this fell destroyer.

Sir Jasper Lydford was essentially a fine gentleman, and belonged to a period when fine gentlemen were of a somewhat loftier mould than they pretend to now-a-days. The macaroni of Walpole's time aspired to be thought a wit; he cultivated belles-lettres, dabbled a little with art, professed no weariness of earth, sun, and moon, but rather affected a kindly interest in that creation which lay, like the

brutes round Orpheus, at his feet, charmed into submission by his splendid graces. He was liberal to lavishness; devoted a good deal of his leisure to play, and lost his money with a superb tranquillity; swore a good deal, drank deeply, but was never seen intoxicated; turned night into day, yet contrived to exhibit himself in the sunshine when fashion demanded the sacrifice; flattered women with the homage of a devotee, and broke their hearts with a gentlemanlike placidity. 'After me the deluge,' was his motto; and when he saw the deluge coming, he generally shot himself, or cut his throat, to the surprise of his friends and his valet, and the despair of his creditors. He had neither religion nor principles; but he danced exquisitely, was a perfect swordsman, contributed dainty versicles to 'The Wreath' or 'The Casket,' and now and then wrote an essay for 'The World.'

Sir Jasper Lydford had not yet developed into this splendid creature. He was still in the bud; but he promised well, and Florio, his valet, was training him. Florio was a grave person of middle age, who had trained more than one fine gentleman

of the British nation. He was with Lord Minehead when that unfortunate nobleman blew out his brains at Florence, in consequence of some gambling transaction; and he had gone straight from his master's grave to the service of Sir Jasper Lydford, who thought himself fortunate to obtain such a treasure. Florio had travelled all over the world—the polite world, that is to say,—from the quaint old palaces of the Hague to the new-built quays and bridges of Petersburg. He was a most accomplished person, spoke four languages, quoted Horace and Catullus, and read Machiavelli for his own delectation. He possessed an imperturbable temper, and could be sworn at with impunity, although so superior a person. Insult or contumely seemed hardly to touch him—as if he belonged to a loftier region than the fopling who spurned him. He was serious and silent; performing all his duties with a wondrous ease and precision, and seeming to take as much delight in arraying his master in the gorgeous and graceful fashion of the day as a painter feels in the picture that grows and glows into life and beauty on his canvas.

To Florio Benoni Sir Jasper attached himself with as near an approach to friendship as a fine gentleman could possibly feel for his paid attendant. When he was laid up with ague in Venice, Florio nursed him, and read to him, and played piquet with him: when he was near death with a tertian fever at Vienna, Florio brought him round. Florio could write his letters—in a small, cramped Italian hand, certainly, but with perfect propriety of language. Florio paid his bills, and would not allow him to be cheated by those Continental harpies who deem a young Englishman travelling in his own coach their especial prey.

Yes, Sir Jasper was really attached to Florio Benoni; but he did not love him so well as that four-footed friend, Sebastian. There was a nearer approach to equality between the fine gentleman and his dog than between the fine gentleman and his valet. Sebastian was Sir Jasper's playfellow and companion. At night he lay on the threshold of the door between his master's bedchamber and dressing-room. He was a brute of marvellous intelligence—a huge and powerful animal, black as Erebus, save for

a little fringe of white about his eyes, and one white spot at the end of his massive tail. Sir Jasper had a suspicion that the dog understood the human tongue. He was a watchful beast, and his slumbers were of the lightest. There was no den of thieves, howsoever vile, that Sir Jasper would have feared to enter with Sebastian at his heels. Not a dog to be cajoled by the enemy, or to be bribed by poisoned meats. A dog to make burglars shake in their list slippers.

Sir Jasper spent a season in London, mixed in the most polite society, fought a duel, entangled himself in two or three flirtations, but kept tolerably heart-whole; played high, and was unlucky in his cards. So adverse was fortune, that when the London season was over, Sir Jasper had overdrawn his banking account, and was fain to post down to Lydford Manor to see what could be got in the way of rents. His estate was managed by a land-steward—a solicitor in a small way at Wiveliscombe, who lived upon this stewardship, like his father before him.

'Florio,' said the baronet, 'we must go down to

my place in Somersetshire. It's a dismal old dungeon, I know, though I don't remember much about it. I've not been there since I was a youngster.'

Florio shrugged his shoulders and smiled, with that gravely courteous air of his which implied that all places were alike to him, provided they were but pleasing or convenient to his master.

But in plain truth it was somewhat inconvenient to Benoni to be carried away thus suddenly from the metropolis. He, too, had lived his life, and courted the blind goddess, and had his schemes, and speculations, and entanglements. It was awkward in the extreme to have his career in London thus brought to a close—snapped short off like a thread cut by the fatal shears.

Sir Jasper Lydford was a gentleman of warm temper and great energy—prone to sudden impulses and unconsidered actions. No sooner had he made up his mind to go down to Somersetshire than he was eager to start.

'Tell them to get post-horses for my travelling chariot,' he said, while Benoni was curling and powdering him. 'I burn to see the old place

again, dreary as it must be by this time; and London is as dull as a graveyard—all the pretty women gone to Bath or Tunbridge.'

'Weather very warm for travelling,' insinuated Benoni.

'Weather insufferable for London,' yawned Sir Jasper, looking at the last number of 'The World' through his eye-glass. 'Horry Walpole says this week's paper is by Chesterfield; but it's vastly stupid, whoever wrote it.'

'They say the small-pox is raging in the west of England; but of course, if my lord wishes to revisit his château—' murmured Benoni, with an air of resignation, as if life or death were immaterial to him personally. He always called Sir Jasper 'my lord'; and, although he could speak four languages, had never yet mastered the difference between a baronetcy and a peerage.

'If it is written in the book of fate that we are to die of the small-pox, we shall get it, wherever we may be. Did it not reach the French king upon his throne, t'other day? You may order the carriage for noon, Florio. And you need take but

little trouble about my things,—half-a-dozen waistcoats, and a dozen or so of cravats—the coquelicot suit, and the myrtle-green—the grey tiffany, perhaps. I may not stay above a week. The place will be deadly dull, no doubt. I am only going to get some money. That cursed faro has exhausted my funds, and the midsummer rents ought to be got in by this time.'

It was only the second week in July; but Sir Jasper's necessities made him eager.

Benoni's looks expressed a grave interest.

'My lord is going to get money from his lands? he inquired.

'What else dost thou suppose the earth was made for? We do not keep corn-fields or farmyards for playthings. Land bestows a certain kind of distinction upon an Englishman, Benoni; but 'tis a deuced bad investment of his fortune. If my father had employed his capital in commerce, and been lucky in his ventures, I should have thousands where I have hundreds. But heaven made me a country gentleman, and I must e'en be content.'

Eleven o'clock struck before Sir Jasper left his

dressing-room; but Benoni had his master's portmanteaux packed and the travelling chariot at the door upon the stroke of twelve. When Sir Jasper came out of the dining-room, where he had been sipping his chocolate and trifling with an epicurean breakfast, Sebastian followed close upon his master's heels, fawning upon him, and whining as if he suspected mischief.

'The faithful brute thinks I am going to leave him,' said Sir Jasper, patting the big blunt black head which had thrust itself affectionately against his breast.

'My lord will not take the dog to Somersetshire?' exclaimed Benoni, astonished.

'Not take him! Dost thou think I'd leave a beast that loves me to the tender mercies of a St. James's lodging-house? He'd be starved, or poisoned, or stole, perchance, before I came back. No; Sebastian goes with his master.'

CHAPTER II.

AT HIS GATES.

THE journey into Somersetshire was long and fatiguing, though the road lay through a land full of summer beauty. It was the great Bath road, famous for its danger from gentlemen of the Dick Turpin breed. Sir Jasper lolled in his chariot, and tossed over the papers, and yawned a little over the last volume of fashionable poetry—the mildest dilution of Pope and Gay—and slept a good deal, and caressed Sebastian. It was fine dry weather, which promised well for the harvest, but was somewhat exhausting for humanity. Sir Jasper's tiffany suit was in no wise too cool.

'If I'd worn the damask I should have been suffocated,' he said.

Sebastian endured the heat and fatigue of the journey with an admirable patience. He stared out of the window, with his big tongue hanging lan-

guidly out of one side of his mouth, and his great brown eyes contemplative of the landscape. He slept even more than his master. He prowled about the yards of the fine old inns where they stopped to eat or to sleep, and, so long as he was not banished from his master, seemed supremely happy.

The longest journey must end at last; and after lying at inns three nights, and travelling for four long summer days—stopping to see an old church or a noted mansion now and then—Sir Jasper's chariot drove through the gates of his own domain.

The gates were opened by the lodge-keeper's daughter—a tall girl, with bright chestnut hair, brown eyes, and a milk-white complexion, powdered with freckles. The sight of this damsel recalled a little bit of family history to Sir Jasper's mind. Thirty years ago his father, Sir Everard, had given the lodge and an acre of garden adjoining it to a poor relation of his own—a bookish man, who had done well at Oxford, but nowhere else in the world, and who was at very low water when his distant kinsman, Sir Everard Lydford, offered him a temporary shelter.

'There's the lodge,' said Sir Everard. 'It was once a Dower-house, but part was pulled down in Queen Anne's time. There's a good garden, and 'tis a roomy cottage even now. You can keep a lad to open the gates, and you may have as much fruit and vegetables, and milk and butter and eggs, as you like from the farm. This may serve while you look about you for a fresh start in life.'

This humble shelter the poor scholar accepted gladly and gratefully. He brought a big chest of books and a very small trunk of clothes to the cottage at the gates of Lydford Manor. These were all his earthly goods. Sir Everard's housekeeper put in some old furniture which had been decaying in lofts and lumber-rooms, and the scholar, who had taste and handiness as well as book learning, soon dressed up and adorned his modest dwelling. He made it so pretty that the lodge was the admiration of most visitors who came to the Manor. But that fresh start in life which Sir Everard had talked of never came. His poor kinsman was too happy at Lydford with his books and his roses to care for doing battle with adverse fate. Fortune had never

meant him to be rich or successful; but Heaven had meant him to be happy. Sitting in the sun on his well-mown grass-plot, poring over a Dutch variorum edition of his favourite Horace, he envied neither king nor kaiser.

He asked Sir Everard for permission to live and die there, and Sir Everard granted the boon with all his heart. His kinsman was modest, and asked for nothing more than had been offered in the first instance. All the servants on the estate adored him. They had never known so perfect a gentleman. So life went on, without a ripple, for about ten years; and then the poor scholar fell in love, and asked his kinsman's permission to marry —or, rather, to remain at the lodge after his marriage, having quite made up his mind to take a wife.

Sir Everard said yes, and wanted to make him a present of a hundred-pound bank-bill. But this the scholar refused with gentle dignity.

'You have given me a home,' he said, 'and a pleasant one. I will never impose upon your generosity. I earn a little money by translations and

revisions for the London booksellers—quite enough for my wants.'

'But a wife will be different,' suggested Sir Everard; 'she will have different notions of life.'

'My wife will be my second self, and will be happy in the simple life that pleases me,' answered Mr. Dorillon with confidence.

The young lady he married was the curate's daughter, who had been reared on the narrowest means, and had one of those sweet natures to which worldly wealth seems but dross when weighed against affection. She came to the scholar's cottage with as much delight as if she had been led home to a palace, and beautified and glorified his life for two short years ere envious death snatched her from his side.

Dark was the gloom of the years that followed that bitter parting. For a little while the scholar's mind went astray; then came a time of dull despair, a sense of aching misery—days that brought no comfort—nights that knew not rest. The pretty cottage was neglected; the bright parasites that mantled its walls grew wild and overran the thatched

roof; the roses were uncared for. But God is merciful, and Time is a mighty healer. One day Stephen Dorillon awakened to the knowledge that he had a lovely and loving child yearning for his affection. He opened his heart to this motherless girl, and she became dear as her mother had been to him. He took comfort, and his days resumed their placid course; the old flavour came back to the books he loved; and the grey-haired student, aged more by sorrow than by time, was able to lift up his voice with Job in his affliction and say, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.'

The memory of this friendly story flashed upon Sir Jasper as he drove past the old half-timbered cottage, covered with roses and myrtle, honey-suckle and jessamine. The roses were cared for now, and made a blaze of bloom on the rough-cast wall. There were birdcages in the open casements—birds singing—butterflies skimming about in the flowery forecourt. Sebastian put his head out of the window and gave a joyous bark, as if he saluted the pretty picture.

'Can that fine girl be old Dorillon's daughter?' wondered Sir Jasper, putting up his glass and looking back at the fair vision.

He could catch but a glimpse of the tall slim figure, the glowing chestnut hair, quilted petticoat, and flowered chintz gown.

This was about all that was fair or beautiful at Lydford Manor. The old house itself had been sorely neglected, both by the guardians of Sir Jasper's minority and by Sir Jasper himself. It was a solid old mansion of the first Charles's time—a house in the shape of a capital E. There was a garden in front, and a fountain, and a dry moat dividing the garden from the park; but the garden was grim and weedy; the gravel walks were gangrened and moss-grown; the fountain had never played since Sir Everard's time.

The inside of the house smelt as chill and damp as a family vault. Shutters had been kept shut; doors opened with an awful clanking like the portals of a gaol. Sir Jasper shuddered as he walked through the desolate rooms. Benoni's sallow complexion assumed a greenish hue. Sebastian sniffed in cor-

ners, and gave forth low growls, as if he smelt brigands and assassins behind the panelling; but perhaps he only scented mice.

The housekeeper was ancient and deaf, and as much astonished by her lord's arrival as if Jupiter had dropped from the clouds. She and a brace of country girls were the sole inhabitants of the deserted old house; but even with this scanty establishment Benoni contrived to make things comfortable before nightfall. He had three of the lightest and pleasantest rooms got ready for his master—as bedchamber, dressing-closet, and study; a suite of apartments on the first floor, fronting southwards, and overlooking garden and park. The house lay in a valley, and to the left, yonder, above the trees, Sir Jasper could just see the white walls and rose-wreathed chimney-stack of Mr. Dorillon's cottage. It was a small thing, but it pleased him.

He dined and slept comfortably, thanks to the all-accomplished Benoni, who was a cook by innate genius as he was a valet by profession. It was Benoni who fried the cutlets, and tossed the omelet

for his master's table, and who took care that the linen for his master's bed was duly aired.

'What should I do without thee, my Benoni, in a savage place like this?' cried the sybarite, as he stretched himself on the best feather-bed in the old manor-house. 'Thou art a treasure of ingenuity and excellence. And now read me Goldoni's play of "Pamela," which is much shorter and more amusing than Richardson's novel, while I sink into a placid slumber. Has Sebastian made himself comfortable?'

'Yes, my lord.'

A rug had been spread for the St. Bernard at the foot of his master's four-poster.

CHAPTER III.

THE MIDSUMMER RENTS.

Sir Jasper sent for his land-steward early next morning, and frankly told him he was a pauper.

'You must get me the Midsummer rents without an hour's delay,' he said.

'Impossible!' cried Mr. Dibber. 'The tenants never pay their Midsummer rents till pretty close upon Michaelmas!'

And then he gave a dozen good agricultural reasons why the farmers should be accorded this much grace.

'I don't care a rush for their cattle, or their pigs, or their cider, or their corn,' replied Sir Jasper. 'I've lost all my money at faro, and I must have some more to go on with. I am going to Paris next week, to see the new king and queen.'

Benoni was present at this conversation, and lent an attentive ear. Mr. Dibber, the steward, promised

to do his best with the tenants, early as it was in the quarter. There were some wealthy farmers among them, who would not mind paying promptly to oblige their landlord. He ventured to promise his employer six or seven hundred pounds in the course of the following day, in hard cash.

'That will do, I think, Benoni,' said Sir Jasper, appealing to his valet. ''Twill last us for a month or six weeks in Paris!'

When Mr. Dibber had retired, the young baronet took up his hat and cane and strolled out, dressed and powdered as for the Mall, and breathing delicate odours of Maréchale and attar of roses, to survey his domain. He had not seen it since he was a school-boy, with a strong inclination to steal his own apples. Sebastian accompanied his master, full of life and gaiety: rushing off to pursue imaginary game, rolling on the dewy grass, revelling in the freshness and beauty of the country, the width and liberty whereof must have been a great relief to his canine mind after the elegant restraint of St. James's. Everything about the manor-house wore the same grim, deserted look: empty stables, empty dog-kennels, coach-houses

in which ancient vehicles were slowly rotting, a prey to time and moths—everywhere the gloom of the grave. No wonder that Sir Jasper turned his back upon the stately old hulk, and walked down the avenue to find a little more brightness and domesticity at Mr. Dorillon's cottage. Sebastian frisked before his master all the way, tearing about the park like a demented dog, chasing the silvery-tailed rabbits, and sending the red-brown squirrels flying up the beech trees. Sir Jasper introduced himself to the old scholar, who received him graciously, but without a shade of subservience or sycophancy.

'You are like my generous friend, your father,' he said. And then it dawned slowly upon his dreamy mind that this arrival of the master of Lydford might be his own notice to quit. It would be like tearing up an old tree to root him from the soil; but who could tell what ideas a young gentleman of fashion might have?

'You are, perchance, contemplating alterations and improvements at the Manor?' he said, in his gentle voice; 'and you may require this cottage for some other purpose than the shelter of old age?'

Whereupon Sir Jasper protested with eagerness that the cottage was entirely at Mr. Dorillon's service, and should always remain so. Nay, he in amanner laid the whole domain at his old friend's feet, declaring that he was proud and happy to have so accomplished a gentleman resident on his estate.

'But I am afraid you are without proper service in this Bœotian district,' said Sir Jasper. 'I was inexpressibly shocked to see Miss Dorillon open the gate yesterday evening!'

'The lad who ordinarily attends to that duty —which, in sooth, rarely calls for his attention— had gone home to his supper,' explained the scholar; 'but my daughter is not proud. She has received the education of a gentlewoman; but she knows that when I am gone she may have to accept a dependent position.'

Miss Dorillon entered suddenly at this moment, and drew back, blushing rosy red at sight of the town gentleman, whom her father made haste to present to her as the son of his benefactor. Sir Jasper's kindly air soon set her at ease, and she was ready to talk to him about her garden, and the

church, and the village, which, with the neglected old park, comprised the only world she knew outside her father's library. Never had Sir Jasper seen so lovely a creature; or so, at any rate, did he think as he talked with her. All his St. James's beauties—with their satin sacques, and Gainsborough hats, and powder and perfumery, and stately curtseys, and flippant smartness of speech—faded before this country girl, with her innate distinction and her unconscious rustic grace. In a word, Sir Jasper, after half losing his heart three times over during the London season last past, lost it altogether to Phillis Dorillon in an hour.

He walked back to the manor-house slowly, in a waking dream, wondering how he should live till it would be decent to call at Mr. Dorillon's cottage again. The rest of the day hung heavy on his hands. He played with Sebastian, and explored the stables, and examined the dusty old library, where the wisdom of the ages had suffered considerably from damp and mildew. Shakespeare was as spotty as if he had had the small-pox; Milton's pages were tarnished and green; Bacon smelt of decay.

After dinner, Sir Jasper contrived to pass Mr. Dorillon's cottage, on pretence of going into the village—with Sebastian at his heels as usual,—and finding the old gentleman trimming his roses went no further, but spent an hour in conversation, during the latter half of which Phillis was present. He went home in another dream, and sat late reading 'Romeo and Juliet,' and thinking how true to nature was the poet's picture of sweet, sudden love.

Next day he spent another hour at the cottage, where Sebastian had already made himself a favourite. The dog had taken it into his head to adore Miss Dorillon from the beginning of their acquaintance, and she was delighted with him. He filled up all awkward gaps in the conversation, and was altogether the pleasantest company, even when he only sat staring amiably, with his tongue out, and wagged his approbation of the company with his big tail, which went flip-flop on the beeswaxed floor of Mr. Dorillon's book-lined parlour.

Sir Jasper now began to have doubts as to the wisdom of that intended departure for the Con-

tinent which he had talked about. The weather would be insufferably warm in Paris; and he could manage to live a little longer without standing amongst a perspiring crowd to see the French king and queen dine in public on a Sunday afternoon. Better delay his visit till the early winter, perhaps, when there would be masquerades and festivities such as the king's gay young brothers affected.

In the meanwhile Sir Jasper felt inclined to patch up his neglected old house, and enjoy the pleasures of country life. A few hundreds judiciously spent would brighten the aspect of things wonderfully. A couple of saddle-horses in the stable, a pointer or two, and a brace of setters in the kennels, a modest bachelor household in the servants' offices—Benoni would soon put matters in train.

The young baronet communicated these new ideas to his valet while he was dining. The Italian listened in respectful silence; and as he was standing behind his master, Sir Jasper did not see the gloom which darkened his countenance as he received this communication. Life in a Somerset-

shire manor-house, were it even for the briefest span, was not at all to Benoni's mind.

After dinner came Mr. Dibber, the steward, with six hundred and fifty-seven pounds, partly in dirty provincial bank notes, and partly in gold; the whole amount tied in a soiled canvas bag. There was a good deal of gold, and the sum made a tolerable heap as Mr. Dibber put down the bag on the polished mahogany table among the old-fashioned dessert dishes. Sir Jasper was grateful for his agent's promptitude.

'You can put the bag in yonder cabinet, Florio,' he said to his valet, giving him the key of a Dutch cabinet in marqueterie work, which had taken his fancy. It was a most elaborate piece of joinery, containing innumerable hiding-places for small treasures—drawers within drawers, cupboards inside cupboards, false bottoms, and simulations of all kinds.

Florio put the bag in one of the innermost compartments, and stood for a minute or so contemplating this lavish waste of mechanical ingenuity.

'Lock the cabinet and give me the key,' said Sir Jasper; whereupon Florio Benoni closed the

folding-doors, which were decorated with a Scriptural subject in inlaid work, and brought his master the queer little brass key. The lock was about as weak and common as a lock could be.

After dinner the fine evening tempted Sir Jasper to another ramble. He whistled to Sebastian as he left his room, and, being somewhat absent-minded just now, had no idea but that the dog was following, till he had got halfway down the avenue; when he looked about him, and was surprised to see no sign of the St. Bernard. He called and whistled, but Sebastian did not appear.

'The old fellow has grown lazy from high feeding,' Sir Jasper said to himself; and strolled gaily on, twirling his clouded cane, and looking up at the rooks holding hoarse council in the waving elm-tops.

This evening good manners withheld him from visiting the cottage; but finding Mr. Dorillon at the gate, he invited that learned gentleman to accompany him to the parish church, where the scholar held forth upon Early English and Perpendicular styles, panelling and horseshoe arches, stringings and mouldings. They wasted some time, pleasantly enough, in

the whitewashed temple which had once been bright with rainbow hues, and then strolled homeward together. Sir Jasper left his friend at the gates without having seen Phillis.

His first inquiry, when Florio Benoni admitted him to the house, was for Sebastian.

Florio looked astonished.

'But was not the dog with my lord?' he asked; 'I have seen of him nothing since dinner.'

Hereupon followed much inquiry, and a prolonged investigation of the premises inside and out; but Sebastian was not to be found.

'He must have gone away with Dibber,' said Sir Jasper, much disturbed by the disappearance of his favourite. But on second thoughts he felt sure that Sebastian would not follow a stranger. Could Dibber have stolen him? Had a respectable country solicitor turned dog-stealer, tempted to crime by Sebastian's exceptional beauty? Hardly credible this; nor was Sebastian a dog to be stolen with facility. It would have been almost as easy to steal an elephant.

Sir Jasper was at his wits' end. Benoni looked thoughtful.

'It might be,' he suggested gravely, 'that some vagabond in the neighbourhood has got wind of the sum of money that my lord was to receive this evening, and that the dog has been tempted away—or even made away with.'

'Heaven forbid!' cried Sir Jasper; 'I would as lief lose my best human friend as Sebastian. I know not that I have one so faithful.'

This suggestion of Florio's seemed the only probable explanation of the dog's evanishment.

'As for your burglars,' said Sir Jasper, 'I snap my fingers at them. I havea pair of horse-pistols on yonder shelf that would make a speedy finish of the ruffians; but I am inexpressibly concerned that any villain should have stolen my dog—to ill-use him, perhaps.'

The young man could almost have shed tears in his vexation and distress. Even Phillis Dorillon was forgotten in this trouble at the loss of Sebastian. Sir Jasper went to bed late, and although he dismissed his valet without the usual evening lecture from Goldoni or Metastasio, he was more wakeful than usual, and tossed and tumbled from side to side till long after midnight.

What was that which awaked him suddenly, just as he was dropping into a light slumber—something scratching at his door; a faint and plaintive whine?

He sprang out of bed, opened the door, and Sebastian crawled into the room, and laid himself at his master's feet exhausted.

Whence had the faithful creature come, and who had thus ill-used him? His side was torn; his head scratched and wounded, as if he had dragged himself with extreme difficulty through some narrow outlet; he was tightly muzzled; and a remnant of rope still hanging from his neck showed that he had been tied up somewhere. But where, and by whom? Shreds of mouldy straw were entangled with his hairy coat; his feet were wet and dirty. He was altogether a pitiable object.

Sir Jasper cut away the muzzle, which was most ingeniously constructed from old straps sewn together. He washed the dog's wounds, and brought him the remains of his own light supper from the table in the sitting-room. The creature's joy and gratitude were boundless, but he was too exhausted to be noisy in his demonstrations. He licked his masters' hands fondly, and fawned upon him, and then lay

down with a long sigh of contentment at the foot of Sir Jasper's bed.

After this, Sir Jasper went to bed with a light heart, and slept profoundly.

'Burglars, I defy you!' he exclaimed, as his head sank upon the pillow. He knew that Sebastian was a better defence than the finest pistols that were over made.

He woke once in the gray morning, fancying he had heard a noise in the next room; and looking at the open door between the two apartments, saw Sebastian walk slowly across the threshold as if returning from a morning scrutiny of the premises. Sir Jasper was curious enough to rise and open his cabinet, the dog watching him intently all the while. There was the money-bag, safe enough in the compartment where Benoni had placed it.

'Lie down, Sebastian,' said Sir Jasper, still very sleepy; and the St. Bernard laid himself down, like a lamb under the semblance of a lion.

But when Sir Jasper rose in the broad daylight, at seven o'clock, he was surprised to see that Sebastian's jowl was bloody; and the blood came from no wound of the dog's own. It was the blood of a foe.

CHAPTER IV.

BENONI'S DOOM.

SIR JASPER rang for his valet; but for the first time within his memory the summons remained unanswered. A man accustomed to very perfect service is prone to become exacting; and Sir Jasper felt this present inattention a positive injury. He rang half a dozen sharp successive peals, which made a clamour in the empty echoing gallery; and presently came the housekeeper's scrub—a buxom girl, with a broad grin, and a strong Somersetshire dialect—and stood on the threshold, far too frightened at the fine gentleman to think of entering the room.

'Where is Florio?' asked Sir Jasper, impatiently, disgusted at this barbarous apparition. 'I want my servant.'

The girl explained, in a tongue that was almost an unknown language to Sir Jasper, that 'Muster Benonny' was ill in bed, and deeply regretted his inability to attend his master that morning.

'Ill!' cried Sir Jasper, as if it were an outrage; 'what's the matter with him?'

'Zoar vrout,' answered the damsel.

'Is that a complaint peculiar to these parts?' asked the baronet, not in the least enlightened.

But after further explanation, it dawned upon him that Benoni was laid up with a sore throat, which ailment being often a precursor of fever, appealed to the baronet's humanity as something serious.

'Send for a doctor,' he said, 'and let the poor fellow have every attention. I can dress myself, tell him; he need not be uneasy about me. And I will come and see him presently.'

The girl departed, and in about ten minutes returned, and informed her master that Mr. Benonny had begged hard that no English doctor should be sent for. He quite understood his own ailment, and knew how to cure himself. It was a complaint to which he had been always subject.

'He has never had it since he has been in my service,' said Sir Jasper. 'I doubt the poor wretch is sickening of a putrid fever.'

Notwithstanding which suspicion, Sir Jasper went to see his servant as soon as he was dressed.

He found Benoni with his sallow complexion changed to a greenish pallor, his eyes bloodshot, his throat wrapped in linen. He seemed quite prostrate; and his voice was so weak as to be hardly audible; but his mind was as clear as ever.

'My poor fellow,' said Sir Jasper, gently; 'this is very sudden.'

Benoni explained, in his faint voice, that these attacks of his always came on suddenly. He had been accustomed to this kind of illness from boyhood. He needed no medical aid.

'Nay, Florio, but be reasonable,' urged his master. 'You are in a foreign country. Who knows how the climate may have affected you? It is just the season for ague and fever; and in England a sore throat is too often the forerunner of a fever. Let me send for a doctor—believe me, 'tis safest.'

But Benoni protested that no English medical man should come near him. They were all ignorant as dirt—they were butchers!

'Did you not tell me yourself how a conclave

of physicians gave up the Duke of Gloucester for dead—declared his case hopeless, and from that hour his grace mended? I will not have an English doctor to assassinate me. I will leave your house sooner, and die in the nearest ditch.'

'I did not think thou wert such an obstinate fool,' exclaimed Sir Jasper, angrily; upon which the sick Italian, with a quickness of temper for which his master was unprepared, retorted that he would be called fool by no man, and that he had the honour to discharge himself from his master's service, and would, with his lordship's permission, leave the manor-house so soon as he should be well enough to crawl to a coach.

Sir Jasper made haste to apologize, and declared he had called Benoni a fool in his own interest, being so anxious that he should have the benefit of medical advice. On this Benoni kissed his patron's hand, and in his turn apologized; but added that he felt himself growing old and weak, and that he must retire from service without delay. With his lordship's leave, he would travel back to London as soon as he could bear the journey.

'Old!' cried Sir Jasper; 'you are scarcely fifty.'

'I feel myself worn out,' replied the Italian.

The suddenness of all this was incomprehensible to Sir Jasper. He had counted upon keeping his servant for the next twenty years. Never before had Benoni complained of age or feebleness.

'I dare say the truth of the matter is that the rascal detests a country life,' thought the baronet, 'or he has heard of a better situation. These Italians are profound dissimulators. There never was his equal for dressing hair, and he has a hundred ways of being useful to me. It will be like the loss of my right hand to be without him. Yet I had rather lose him than Sebastian.'

He had left the dog locked in his rooms. He would hardly trust the brute out of his sight after the adventure of yesterday.

The morning hung heavy on the fine gentleman's hands. A little country life goes a long way with a man accustomed to cities. Entertaining the ideas he did about Benoni's sore throat, Sir Jasper was too conscientious to approach Mr. Dorillon's cottage. He roamed about the park with Sebastian, explored

a neighbouring wood, and went home hot and dusty, wishing that he had a horse to ride, or a friend to take a hand at cards with him. Benoni had played piquet with him many a time, when he, the master, was ill; and now he felt tempted to take a pack of cards to his valet's bedside and there beguile a summer afternoon. But this would have been unbecoming, perhaps, and not without danger, if Benoni's sore throat betokened the incubation of an infectious fever.

He went to see his valet, and found him still faint and weak, indisposed to speak much of his illness, and totally averse from receiving medical advice of any kind. He had put on a cold water poultice, he told his master, and this was the simple and effectual remedy for his complaint.

Sir Jasper roamed about the old house till dinner-time, looking at the pictures, which were for the most part trumpery,—bad copies of old Dutch and Flemish masters, spurious Holbeins as hard as tea-boards, and portraits of departed Lydfords, life size, and as works of art not worth the canvas they were painted upon.

Before sunset Sir Jasper was quite worn out. He had yawned until his jaws ached; he had even begun a sonnet after the Italian, but his rhymes did not flow freely. He cast himself prostrate on a sofa, and began to be aweary of the sun.

In this state he was discovered by Mr. Dorillon, who came to the manor-house full of alarm, having heard from the lad who worked in his garden that Sir Jasper's valet had fallen ill of a putrid fever, that his master had taken the infection from him, and that neither was likely to live through the night. Sir Jasper was delighted to see his friend, yet was anxious to keep him at arm's length.

'I know not if you are justified in sitting in the same room with me,' he said; and then he told Mr. Dorillon about Benoni's sore throat, and his own suspicion that it was a case of fever.

'The poor creature's eyes had a glassy look, and his pulse was quick and feeble when I last saw him,' he added. 'I fear he is much worse than he will confess himself.'

'I have some slight knowledge of medicine,' said the scholar, who had Lord Bacon's recipes at his

fingers' ends, and believed in that experimental philosopher as a master of medical science. 'I should be glad to see your servant. I might, perhaps, suggest something. There are numerous astringents which might be useful in such a case—"'Red rose, blackberry, myrtle, plantain, flower of pomegranate, mint, aloes well washed, myrobalanes, sloes, agrestia fragra, mastich, myrrh——"'

'I would not have you see him for worlds,' cried Sir Jasper, cutting short the catalogue; 'you might carry the contagion home to Miss Dorillon.'

'Poor child,' said the scholar, innocently, 'she was nigh swooning when she heard you were dying. She has a tender heart. I must hasten back to relieve her fears.'

'Ay, do,' cried Sir Jasper; 'I cannot bear you to stay in this fever-tainted house. But before you go I must tell you of something which happened last night, and which has puzzled me sorely.'

Sir Jasper proceeded to relate the disappearance of Sebastian, and his reappearance under such strange circumstances; the noise faintly heard in the

night; and his discovery of the dog's blood-stained jowl in the morning.

'This looked like the evidence of a struggle,' concluded Sir Jasper; 'yet I found my money safe in the cabinet.'

'Do you sleep with your door unlocked?' inquired Mr. Dorillon. 'I should have thought in this big lonely house you would have turned the key before retiring to rest.'

'I dare say I might have done so had there been any key to turn. But in this patrimonial mansion of mine everything is more or less out of repair, and the key of my sitting-room is missing.'

Mr. Dorillon threw out a surmise or two; but his theories were of a strictly mediæval character, and he was inclined to smell magic, or at least witchcraft, in this mysterious business. Sir Jasper walked to the end of the avenue with his elderly friend, and parted from him within a stone's throw of the cottage. He went slowly home in the moonlight with Sebastian; and that tender silvery light melted him as it had seldom done before, even amidst Italia's poetic scenery.

'In sooth, I fear I am in love,' he said to himself, smiling gently at his own sweet folly. 'Yesterday it was Rosaline; to-day it is Juliet—and Juliet means a real and fatal passion. But, thank God, we have no Capulets and Montagues to make a brawl out of our loves. It rests but with ourselves to marry and be happy all the days of our lives.'

He had so good an opinion of own his merits as to feel very sure of Miss Dorillon's favour. She had well-nigh swooned when she thought he was in danger! Did not that imply that she loved him?

The household drudge met him on the threshold of the manor-house with a scared countenance.

'Oh, sir, Mr. Benonny is dying,' she gasped, 'and he wants to see you sorely.'

The news smote Sir Jasper to the heart. He had almost forgotten his faithful servant in his own happy love-dream. And Benoni had nursed him and watched beside him in his hour of peril!

He hurried to his valet's room, and found Florio Benoni sitting up in bed, a ghastly figure, his face livid, the linen bandage round his throat crimson with blood. The old housekeeper was holding him

up. His eyes were turned to the door, as if watching for his master's coming.

'My poor Benoni!' said Sir Jasper gently, approaching the bed. 'But, great heaven! what is this? Your throat is bleeding! Rash man, hast thou attempted self-destruction?

'No,' answered Benoni, hoarsely; 'but my own crime has destroyed me. I sent for you, Sir Jasper, first to acquit my soul by confession of my guilt—if there be a priest of my church within call, I entreat you to have him summoned—and, next, that my awful fate should prove a warning to yourself.'

'Go,' cried Sir Jasper, taking the housekeeper's place beside Benoni; 'go—send a messenger to Taunton. There may, perchance, be a Catholic priest in the town. Let inquiry be made without delay.'

The old woman went, shaking her head doubtfully.

'And now, my poor Benoni, we are alone,' said Sir Jasper. 'Tell me, what means this sad business?'

'It means that I tried to rob the most generous of masters,' answered the Italian. 'It means that I have been so base a slave of my own passions that

having ruined myself at the gaming-table—ay, having played many a time with money pilfered from your lordship—I was possessed with the belief that I could redeem all I had lost, and make my fortune, could I but furnish myself with a round sum of money, and play till the dice favoured me—and my run of luck came. Every man has his fortunate hour, I thought; empty pockets have balked me just at the turn of luck. We came here, and I was angry at leaving London. I was present when you received that bag of money, and the devil at my elbow whispered, "Such a sum as that would bring you certain fortune." I wrestled with the tempter. Indeed, my lord, I did not yield easily; but the whisper was always in my ear—"You may get the money so easily. You need not harm him. He will never suspect you. He can afford to lose as much, and be no worse off at the end of the year. It will but stint him of a few foolish pleasures." I listened to the fiend's suggestion, and made my plans. I might have taken the money-bag out of the cabinet in the day time while you were out walking; but had I done so, suspicion would have fallen on me. I must

make the robbery appear the work of a burglar. It must be done in the night.'

There was a pause, during which the Italian fell back upon his pillow, struggling for breath. Throughout his confession speech had been painful to him. His sentences had come in gasps.

'Tell me no more, Benoni,' cried his master. 'I can guess the rest. You shut my faithful dog in some wretched hole—'

'In a cellar under the kitchen. There was a grating; but I thought it too small for him to pass through, even had he got loose; and he was muzzled and tied up with strong rope. I meant to do him no harm. I should have contrived some means of getting him released after I had secured the money, though I might have feared to go near him myself after having once betrayed him.

'You would have been right in that,' said Sir Jasper. 'A creature so faithful would have been quick to resent treachery.'

'I came to your room in the dead of night, knowing you were a sound sleeper, and believing the dog secure in the cellar. I was a desperate man,

my lord. The fiend had me altogether in his grip by this time. Had you awakened and discovered me, I know not of what crime I might have been guilty. I had a dagger in my waistcoat. I had scarce crossed the threshold when the dog flew at me like a demon, had me on the ground, tearing my throat. Vainly did I strive to clutch my dagger; I was pinioned, mauled, and helpless. When he released me I could scarce crawl from the room. The wound and the shock together have been my death. Yes, I feel that this is death which is creeping upon me. I thought this morning that I had stanched the wound in my throat, but it burst out bleeding afresh an hour ago, and I feel that I cannot recover.'

It *was* death. Florio Benoni's brow was damp with humanity's last agony. He lingered till next morning, conscious to the last, and, assured of his master's forgiveness, strove hard to make his peace with God. No priest of the old faith came to smooth the dying sinner's passage to eternity. The messenger had failed in his errand. But Benoni died with a crucifix that had been his mother's clasped in his feeble hands, believing his sins forgiven.

A year later, and the neglected manor-house was as pleasant and cheerful a mansion as could be found in homely old England: horses in the stalls, dogs in the kennels, well-fed servants indoors and out, and all the noise and bustle of busy life from sunrise to sundown. Sir Jasper was cured of card-playing and all other London vices, and at five-and-twenty found himself, much to his own satisfaction, a sober married man and a country squire, beloved by his tenants and household, popular among his neighbours, living the life which, perhaps, of all human existences, is capable of the most pleasure and subject to the least care.

And in all his household there was no member more highly honoured than his faithful dog Sebastian.

LEVISON'S VICTIM.

'HAVE you seen Horace Wynward?'

'No. You don't mean to say that he is here?'

'He is indeed. I saw him last night; and I think I never saw a man so much changed in so short a time.'

'For the worse?'

'Infinitely for the worse. I should scarcely have recognized him but for that peculiar look in his eyes, which I dare say you remember.'

'Yes; deep-set gray eyes, with an earnest penetrating look that seems to read one's most hidden thoughts. I'm very sorry to hear of this change in him. We were at Oxford together, you know; and his place is near my father's in Buckinghamshire. We have been fast friends for a long time; but I lost sight of him about two years ago, before I went on my Spanish rambles, and I've heard nothing of him

since. Do you think he has been leading a dissipated life—going the pace a little too violently ?'

'I don't know what he has been doing; but I fancy he must have been travelling during the last year or two, for I've never come across him in London.'

'Did you speak to him last night ?'

'No; I wanted very much to get hold of him for a few minutes' chat, but couldn't manage it. It was in one of the gambling-rooms I saw him, on the opposite side of the table. The room was crowded. He was standing looking on at the game over the heads of the players. You know how tall he is, and what a conspicuous figure anywhere. I saw him one minute, and in the next he had disappeared. I left the rooms in search of him, but he was not to be seen anywhere.'

'I shall try and hunt him up to-morrow. He must be stopping at one of the hotels. There can't be much difficulty in finding him.'

The speakers were two young Englishmen; the scene a lamplit grove of trees outside the Kursaal of a German spa. The elder, George Theobald,

was a barrister of the Inner Temple; the younger, Francis Lorrimore, was the son and heir of a Buckinghamshire squire, and a gentleman at large.

'What was the change that struck you so painfully, George?' Lorrimore asked between the puffs of his cigar; 'you couldn't have seen much of Wynward in that look across the gaming-table.'

'I saw quite enough. His face has a worn, haggard expression, he looks like a man who never sleeps; and there's a fierceness about the eyes—a contraction of the brows, a kind of restless searching look—as if he were on the watch for some one or something. In short, the poor fellow seemed to me altogether queer—the sort of man one would expect to hear of as being shut up in a madhouse, or committing suicide, or something bad of that kind.'

'I shall certainly hunt him out, George.'

'It would be only a kindness to do so, old fellow, as you and he have been intimate. Stay!' exclaimed Mr. Theobald, pointing suddenly to a figure in the distance. 'Do you see that tall man under the trees yonder? I've a notion it's the very man we're talking of.'

They rose from the bench on which they had been sitting smoking their cigars for the last half-hour, and walked in the direction of the tall figure pacing slowly under the pine trees. There was no mistaking that muscular frame—six-feet-two, if an inch—and the peculiar carriage of the head. Frank Lorrimore touched his friend lightly on the shoulder, and he turned round suddenly and faced the two young men, staring at them blankly, without a sign of recognition.

Yes, it was indeed a haggard face, with a latent fierceness in the deep-set gray eyes overshadowed by strongly marked black brows, but a face which, seen at its best, must needs have been very handsome.

'Wynward,' said Frank, 'don't you know me?'

Lorrimore held out both his hands. Wyndward took one of them slowly, looking at him like a man suddenly awakened from sleep.

'Yes,' he said, 'I know you well enough now, Frank, but you startled me just this moment. I was thinking. How well you're looking, old fellow! What, you here too, Theobald?'

'Yes; I saw you in the rooms last night,'

answered Theobald as they shook hands; 'but you were gone before I could get a chance of speaking to you. Where are you staying?'

'At the Hôtel des Etrangers. I shall be off to-morrow.'

'Don't run away in such a hurry, Horace,' said Frank; 'it looks as if you wanted to cut us.'

'I'm not very good company just now; you'd scarcely care to see much of me.'

'You are not looking very well, Horace, certainly. Have you been ill?'

'No, I am never ill; I am made of iron, you know.'

'But there's something wrong, I'm afraid.'

'There is something wrong, but nothing that sympathy or friendship can mend.'

'Don't say that, my dear fellow. Come to breakfast with me to-morrow, and tell me your troubles.'

'It's a common story enough; I shall only bore you.'

'I think you ought to know me better than that.'

'Well, I'll come, if you like,' Horace Wynward answered in a softer tone; 'I'm not very much given to confide in friendship, but you were once a kind of younger brother of mine, Frank. Yes, I'll come. How long have you been here?'

'I only came yesterday. I am at the Couronne d'Or, where I discovered my friend Theobald, happily for me, at the *table-d'hôte*. I am going back to Buckinghamshire next week. Have you been at Crofton lately?'

'No; Crofton has been shut up for the last two years. The old housekeeper is there, of course, and there are men to keep the gardens in order. I shouldn't like the idea of my mother's flower-garden being neglected; but I doubt if I shall ever live at Crofton.'

'Not when you marry, Horace?'

'Marry? Yes, when that event occurs I may change my mind,' he answered, with a scornful laugh.

'Ah, Horace, I see there is a woman at the bottom of your trouble!'

Wynward took no notice of this remark, and began to talk of indifferent subjects.

The three young men walked for some time under the pines, smoking and talking in a fragmentary manner. Horace Wynward had an absent-minded way, which was not calculated to promote a lively style of conversation; but the others indulged his humour, and did not demand much from him. It was late when they shook hands and separated.

'At ten o'clock to-morrow, Horace?' said Frank.

'I shall be with you at ten. Good night.'

Mr. Lorrimore ordered an excellent breakfast, and a little before ten o'clock awaited his friend in a pretty sitting-room overlooking the gardens of the hotel. He had been dreaming of Horace all night, and was thinking of him as he walked up and down the room waiting his arrival. As the little clock on the mantelpiece struck the hour, Mr. Wynward was announced. His clothes were dusty, and he had a tired look even at that early hour. Frank welcomed him heartily.

'You look as if you had been walking, Horace,' he said, as they sat down to breakfast.

'I have been on the hills since five o'clock this morning.'

'So early?'

'Yes; I am a bad sleeper. It is better to walk than to lie tossing about hour after hour, thinking the same thoughts, with maddening repetition.'

'My dear boy, you will make yourself ill with this kind of life.'

'Don't I tell you that I am never ill? I never had a day's illness in my life. I suppose when I die I shall go down at a shot—apoplexy or heart disease. Men of my build generally do.'

'I hope you may have a long life.'

'Yes, a long life of emptiness.'

'Why shouldn't it be a useful, happy life, Horace?'

'Because it was shipwrecked two years ago. I set sail for a given port, Frank, with a fair wind in my favour; and my ship went down in sight of land, on a summer's day, without a moment's warning. I can't rig another boat, and make for another harbour, as some men can. All my world's wealth was adventured in this one argosy. That

sounds tall talk, doesn't it? but you see there is such a thing as passion in the world, and I've so much faith in your sympathy that I'm not ashamed to tell you what a fool I have been, and still am. You were such a romantic fellow five years ago, Frank; and I used to laugh at your sentimental notions.'

'Yes, I was obliged to stand a good deal of ridicule from you.'

'Let those laugh who win. It was in my last long vacation that I went to read at a quiet little village on the Sussex coast, with a retired tutor, an eccentric old fellow, but a miracle of learning. He had three daughters, the eldest of them, to my mind, the loveliest girl that ever the sun shone upon. I'm not going to make a long story of it. I think it was a case of love at sight. I know that before I had been a week in the humdrum sea-coast village, I was over head and ears in love with Laura Daventry; and at the end of a month I was happy in the belief that my love was returned. She was the dearest, brightest of girls, with a sunshiny disposition that won her friends in every direction;

and a man must have had a dull soul who could have withstood the charm of her society. I was free to make my own choice, rich enough to marry a penniless girl; and before I went back to Oxford I made her an offer. It was accepted; and I returned to the University the happiest of men.'

He drank a cup of coffee, and rose from the table to walk up and down the room.

'Well, Frank, you would imagine that nothing could arise to interfere with our happiness after this. In worldly circumstances I was what would be considered an excellent match for Miss Daventry, and I had every reason to believe that she loved me. She was very young, not quite eighteen; and I was the first man who had ever proposed to her. I left her, with the most entire confidence in her good faith; and to this hour I believe in her.'

There was a pause, and then he went on again.

'We corresponded, of course. Laura's letters were charming; and I had no greater delight than in receiving and replying to them. I had promised her to work hard for my degree, and for her sake

I kept my promise, and won it. My first thought was to carry her the news of my success; and directly the examinations were over I ran down to Sussex. I found the cottage empty. Mr. Daventry was in London; the two younger girls had gone to Devonshire, to an aunt who kept a school there. About Miss Daventry the neighbours could give me no positive information. She had left a few days before her father, but no one knew where she had gone. When I pressed them more closely they told me that it was rumoured in the village that she had gone away to be married. A gentleman from the Spanish colonies, a Mr. Levison, had been staying at the cottage for some weeks, and had disappeared about the same time as Miss Laura.'

'And you believe that she had eloped with him?'

'To this day I am ignorant as to the manner of her leaving. Her last letters were only a week old. She had told me of this Mr. Levison's residence in their household. He was a wealthy merchant, a distant relation of her father's, and was staying in Sussex for his health. This was all she had said of him. Of their approaching departure she had not

given me the slightest hint. No one in the village could tell me Mr. Daventry's London address. The cottage, a furnished one, had been given up to the landlord, and every debt paid. I went to the post-office, but the people there had received no directions as to the forwarding of letters, nor had any come as yet for Mr. Daventry.'

'The girls in Devonshire—you applied to them, I suppose?'

'I did; but they could tell me nothing. I wrote to Emily, the elder girl, begging her to send me her sister's address. She answered my letter immediately. Laura had left home with her father's full knowledge and consent, she said, but had not told her sisters where she was going. She had seemed very unhappy. The whole affair had been sudden and her father had also appeared much distressed in mind. This was all I could ascertain. I put an advertisement in the *Times*, addressed to Mr. Daventry, begging him to let me know his whereabouts; but nothing came of it. I employed a man to hunt London for him, and hunted myself; but without avail. I wasted months in this

futile search, now on one false track, now on another.'

'And you have long ago given up all hope, I suppose?' I said, as he paused, walking up and down the room with a moody face.

'Given up all hope of seeing Laura Levison alive? Yes; but not of tracking her destroyer.'

'Laura Levison! Then you think she married the Spanish merchant?'

'I am sure of it. I had been more than six months on the look-out for Mr. Daventry, and had begun to despair of finding him, when the man I employed came to me and told me that he had found the registry of a marriage between Michael Levison and Laura Daventry at an obscure church in the City, where he had occasion to make researches for another client. The date of the marriage was within a few days of Laura's departure from Sussex.'

'Strange!'

'Yes, strange that a woman could be so fickle, you would say. I felt convinced that there had been something more than girlish inconstancy at work in

this business—some motive power strong enough to induce this girl to sacrifice herself in a loveless marriage. I was confirmed in this belief when, within a very short time of the discovery of the registry, I came suddenly upon old Daventry in the street. He would willingly have avoided me; but I insisted on a conversation with him, and he reluctantly allowed me to accompany him to his lodging, a wretched place in Southwark. He was very ill, with the stamp of death upon his face, and had a craven look that convinced me it was to him I was indebted for my sorrow. I told him that I knew of his daughter's marriage, when and where it had taken place, and boldly accused him of having brought it about.'

'How did he take your accusation?'

'Like a beaten hound. He whimpered piteously, and told me that the marriage had been no wish of his. But Levison had possession of secrets which made him the veriest slave. Little by little I wrung from him the nature of these secrets. They related to forged bills of exchange, in which the old man had made free with his kinsman's name. It was a

transaction of many years ago; but Levison had used this power in order to induce Laura to marry him; and the girl, to save her father from disgrace and ruin, as she believed, had consented to become his wife. Levison had promised to do great things for the old man, but had left England immediately after his marriage, without settling a shilling on his father-in-law. It was altogether a dastardly business: the girl had been sacrificed to her father's weakness and folly. I asked him why he had not appealed to me, who could no doubt have extricated him from his difficulty; but he could give me no clear answer. He evidently had an overpowering dread of Michael Levison. I left him, utterly disgusted with his imbecility and selfishness; but, for Laura's sake, I took care that he wanted for nothing during the remainder of his life. He did not trouble me long.'

'And Mrs. Levison?'

'The old man told me that the Levisons had gone to Switzerland. I followed post-haste, and traced them from place to place, closely questioning the people at all the hotels. The accounts I heard were

by no means encouraging. The lady did not seem happy. The gentleman looked old enough to be her father, and was peevish and fretful in his manner, never letting his wife out of his sight, and evidently suffering agonies of jealousy on account of the admiration which her beauty won for her from every one they met. I traced them stage by stage, through Switzerland into Italy, and then suddenly lost the track. I concluded that they had returned to England by some other route; but all my attempts to discover traces of their return were useless. Neither by land nor by sea passage could I hear of the yellow-faced trader and his beautiful young wife. They were not a couple to be overlooked easily; and this puzzled me. Disheartened and dispirited, I halted in Paris, where I spent a couple of months in hopeless idleness—a state of utter stagnation, from which I was aroused abruptly by a communication from my agent, a private detective—a very clever fellow in his way, and well in with the police of civilized Europe. He sent me a cutting from a German newspaper, which described the discovery of a corpse in the Tyrol. It was supposed, from the

style of the dress, to be the body of an English-woman; but no indication of a name or address had been found, to give a clue to identity. Whether the dead woman had been the victim of foul play, or whether she had met her death from an accidental fall, no one had been able to decide. The body had been found at the bottom of a mountain gorge, the face disfigured by the fall from the height above. Had the victim been a native of the district, it might have been easily supposed that she had lost her footing on the mountain path; but that a stranger should have travelled alone by so unfrequented a route seemed highly improbable. The spot at which the body was found lay within a mile of a small village; but it was a place rarely visited by travellers of any description.

'Had your agent any reason to identify this woman with Mrs. Levison?'

'None; except the fact that Mrs. Levison was missing, and his natural habit of suspecting the very worst. The paragraph was nearly a month old when it reached me. I set off at once for the place named; saw the village authorities, and visited the English-

woman's grave. They showed me the dress she had worn; a black silk, very simply made. Her face had been too much disfigured by the fall, and the passage of time that had occurred before the finding of the body, for my informants to give me any minute description of her appearance. They could only tell me that her hair was dark auburn, the colour of Laura's, thick and long; and that her figure was that of a young woman.

'After exhausting every possible inquiry, I pushed on to the next village, and there received confirmation of my worst fears. A gentleman and his wife—the man of foreign appearance, but talking English, the woman young and beautiful—had stopped for a night at the chief inn of the place, and had left the next morning without a guide. The gentleman, who talked German perfectly, told the landlady that his travelling carriage and servants were to meet him at the nearest stage on the home journey. He knew every inch of the country, and wished to walk across the mountain, in order to show his wife a prospect which had struck him particularly upon his last expedition a few years before. The landlady remembered that, just before

setting out, he asked his wife some question about her watch, took it from her to regulate it, and then, after some peevish exclamation about her carelessness in leaving it unwound, put it into his waistcoat pocket. The lady was very pale and quiet, and seemed unhappy. The description which the landlady gave me was only too like the woman I was looking for.'

'And you believe there had been foul play?'

'As certainly as I believe in my own existence. This man Levison had grown tired of a wife whose affection had never been his; nay, more, I have reason to know that his unresting jealousy had intensified into a kind of hatred of her some time before the end. From the village in the Tyrol, which they left together on the bright October morning, I tracked their footsteps stage by stage back to the point at which I had lost them on the Italian frontier. In the course of my wanderings I met with a young Austrian officer who had seen them at Milan, and had ventured to pay the lady some harmless attentions. He told me that he had never seen anything so appalling as Levison's jealousy;

not an open fury, but a concentrated silent rage, which gave an almost devilish expression to the man's parchment face. He watched his wife like a lynx, and did not allow her a moment's freedom from his presence. Every one who met them pitied the beautiful girlish wife, whose misery was so evident; every one loathed her tyrant. I found that the story of the servants and the travelling carriage was a lie. The Levisons had been attended by no servants at any of the hotels where I heard of them, and had travelled always in public or in hired vehicles. The ultimate result of my inquiries left me little doubt that the dead woman was Laura Levison; and from that hour to this I have been employed, more or less, in the endeavour to find the man who murdered her.'

'And you have not been able to discover his whereabouts?' asked Frank Lorrimore.

'Not yet. I am looking for him.'

'A useless quest, Horace. What would be the result of your finding him? you have no proof to offer of his guilt. You would not take the law into your own hands?'

'By the heaven above me, I would!' answered the other, fiercely. 'I would shoot that man down with as little compunction as I would kill a mad dog.'

'I hope you may never meet him,' said Frank, solemnly.

Horace Wynward gave a short impatient sigh, and paced the room for some time in silence. His share in the breakfast had been a mere pretence. He had emptied his coffee-cup, but had eaten nothing.

'I am going back to London this afternoon, Frank.'

'On the hunt for this man?'

'Yes. My agent sent me a description of a man calling himself Lewis, a bill-discounter, who has lately set up an office in the City, and whom I believe to be Michael Levison.'

The office occupied by Mr. Lewis, the bill-discounter, was a dismal place enough, consisting of a second floor in a narrow alley called St. Guinevere's Lane. Horace Wynward presented himself at this office about a week after his arrival in London, in the character of a gentleman in difficulties.

He found Mr. Lewis exactly the kind of man he expected to see; a man of about fifty, with small crafty black eyes shining out of a sallow visage that was as dull and lifeless as a parchment mask, thin lips, and a heavy jaw and bony chin that betokened no small amount of power for evil.

Mr. Wynward presented himself under his own name; on hearing which the bill-discounter looked up at him suddenly with an exclamation of surprise.

'You know my name?' said Horace.

'Yes; I have heard your name before. I thought you were a rich man.'

'I have a good estate, but I have been rather imprudent, and am short of ready money. Where and when did you hear my name, Mr. Lewis?'

'I don't remember that. The name sounds familiar to me, that is all.'

'But you have heard of me as a rich man, you say?'

'I had an impression to that effect. But the circumstances under which I heard the name have quite escaped my memory.'

Horace pushed the question no further. He played his cards very carefully, leading the usurer to believe that he had secured a profitable prey. The preliminaries of a loan were discussed, but nothing fully settled. Before leaving the money-lender's office, Horace Wynward invited Mr. Lewis to dine with him at his lodgings, in the neighbourhood of Piccadilly, on the following evening. After a few minutes' reflection Lewis accepted the invitation.

He made his appearance at the appointed hour, dressed in a suit of shabby black, in which his sallow complexion looked more than usually parchment-like and ghastly. The door was opened by Horace Wynward in person, and the money-lender was surprised to find himself in an almost empty house. In the hall and on the staircase there were no signs of occupation whatever; but, in the dining-room, to which Horace immediately ushered his guest, there was a table ready laid for dinner, a couple of chairs, and a dumb-waiter loaded with the appliances of the meal. The dishes and sauce tureens were on a hot plate in the fender. The room was dimly lighted by four wax candles in a tarnished candelabrum.

Mr. Lewis, the money-lender, looked round him with a shudder; there was something sinister in the aspect of the room.

'It's rather a dreary-looking place, I'm afraid,' said Horace Wynward. 'I've only just taken the house, you see, and have had in a few sticks of hired furniture to keep me going till I make arrangements with an upholsterer. But you'll excuse all shortcomings, I'm sure—bachelor fare, you know.'

'I thought you said you were in lodgings, Mr. Wynward.'

'Did I?' asked the other, absently; 'a mere slip of the tongue. I took this house on lease a week ago, and am going to furnish it as soon as I am in funds.'

'And are you positively alone here?' inquired Mr. Lewis, rather suspiciously.

'Well, very nearly so. There is a charwoman somewhere in the depths below, as deaf as a post, and almost as useless. But you needn't be frightened about your dinner; I ordered it in from a confectioner in Piccadilly. We must wait upon ourselves, you

know, in a free and easy way, for that dirty old woman would take away our appetites.'

He lifted the cover of the soup tureen as he spoke. The visitor seated himself at the table with rather a nervous air, and glanced more than once in the direction of the shutters, which were closely fastened with heavy bars. He began to think there was something alarmingly eccentric in the conduct and manner of his host, and was inclined to repent having accepted the invitation, profitable as his new client promised to be.

The dinner was excellent, the wines of the finest quality; and, after drinking somewhat freely, Mr. Lewis began to be better reconciled to his position. He was a little disconcerted, however, on perceiving that his host scarcely touched either the viands or the wine, and that those deep-set gray eyes were lifted every now and then to his face with a strangely observant look. When dinner was over, Mr. Wynward heaped the dishes on the dumb-waiter, wheeled it into the next room with his own hands, and came back to his seat at the table opposite the bill-discounter, who sat meditatively sipping his claret.

Horace filled his glass, but remained for some time silent, without once lifting it to his lips. His companion watched him nervously, every moment more impressed with the belief that there was something wrong in his new client's mind, and bent on making a speedy escape. He finished his claret, looked at his watch, and rose hastily.

'I think I must wish you good night, Mr. Wynward. I am a man of early habits, and have some distance to go. My lodgings are at Brompton, nearly an hour's ride from here.'

'Stay,' said Horace, 'we have not begun business yet. It's only nine o'clock. I want an hour's quiet talk with you, Mr. Levison.'

The bill-discounter's face changed. It was almost impossible for that pallid mask of parchment to grow paler, but a sudden ghastliness came over the man's evil countenance.

'My name is Lewis,' he said, with an artificial grin.

'Lewis, or Levison. Men of your trade have as many names as they please. When you were travelling in Switzerland two years ago your name was

Levison; when you married Laura Daventry your name was Levison.'

'You are under some absurd mistake, sir. The name of Levison is strange to me.'

'Is the name of Daventry strange to you too? You recognized my name yesterday. When you first heard it, I was a happy man, Michael Levison. The blight upon me is your work. Oh, I know you well enough, and am provided with ample means for your identification. I have followed you step by step upon your travels—tracked you to the inn from which you set out one October morning, nearly a year ago, with a companion who was never seen alive by mortal eyes after that date. You are a good German scholar, Mr. Levison. Read that.'

Horace Wynward took out of his pocket-book the paragraph cut from the German paper, and laid it before his visitor. The bill-discounter pushed it away, after a hasty glance at its contents.

'What has this to do with me?' he asked.

'A great deal, Mr. Levison. The hapless woman described in that paragraph was once your wife: Laura Daventry, the girl I loved, and who returned

my love; the girl whom you basely stole from me, by trading on her natural affection for a weak, unworthy father, and whose life you made wretched, until it was foully ended by your own cruel hand. If I had stood behind you upon that lonely mountain pathway in the Tyrol, and had seen you hurl your victim to destruction, I could not be more convinced than I am that your hand did the deed; but such crimes as these are difficult—in this case perhaps impossible—to prove, and I fear you will escape the gallows There are other circumstances in your life, however more easily brought to light; and by the aid of a clever detective I have made myself master of some curious secrets in your past existence. I know the name you bore some fifteen years ago, before you settled in Trinidad as a merchant. You were at that time called Michael Lucas, and you fled from this country with a large sum of money, embezzled from your employers, Messrs. Hardwell and Oliphant, sugar brokers in Nicholas Lane. You have been 'wanted' a long time, Mr. Levison; but you would most likely have gone scot-free to the end, had I not set my agent to hunt you and your antecedents.'

Michael Levison rose from his seat hastily, trembling in every limb. Horace rose at the same moment, and the two men stood face to face—one the very image of craven fear, the other cool and self-possessed.

'This is a tissue of lies!' gasped Levison, wiping his lips nervously with a handkerchief that fluttered in his tremulous fingers. 'Have you brought me here to insult me with this madman's talk?'

'I have brought you here to your doom. There was a time when I thought that if you and I ever stood face to face, I should shoot you down like a dog; but I have changed my mind. Such carrion dogs as you are not worth the stain of blood upon an honest man's hand. It is useless to tell you how I loved the girl you murdered. Your savage nature would not comprehend any but the basest and most selfish passion. Don't stir another step—I have a loaded revolver within reach, and shall make an end of you if you attempt to quit this room. The police are on the watch for you outside, and you will leave this place for a gaol. Hark! what is that?'

It was the sound of a footstep on the stairs out-

side, a woman's light footstep, and the rustling of a silk dress. The dining-room door was ajar, and the sounds were distinctly audible in the empty house. Michael Levison made for the door, availing himself of this momentary diversion, with some vague hope of escape; but, within a few paces of the threshold, he recoiled suddenly, with a hoarse gasping cry.

The door was pushed wide open by a light hand, and a figure stood upon the threshold—a girlish figure dressed in black silk, a pale sad face framed by dark auburn hair.

'The dead returned to life!' cried Levison. 'Hide her, hide her! I can't face her! Let me go!'

He made for the other door, leading into the inner room, but found it locked, and then sank cowering down into a chair, covering his eyes with his skinny hands. The girl came softly into the room and stood by Horace Wynward.

'You have forgotten me, Mr. Levison,' she said; 'and you take me for my sister's ghost. I was always like her, and they say I have grown more so within the last two years. We had a letter from you a month ago, posted from Trinidad, telling us that

my sister Laura was well and happy there with you; yet you mistake me for the shadow of the dead!'

The frightened wretch did not look up. He had not yet recovered from the shock produced by his sister-in-law's sudden appearance. The handkerchief which he held to his lips was stained with blood. Horace Wynward went quietly to the outer door and opened it, returning presently with two men, who came softly into the room and approached Levison. He made no attempt to resist them as they slipped a pair of handcuffs on his bony wrists and led him away. There was a cab standing outside, ready to convey him to prison.

Emily Daventry sank into a chair as he was taken from the room.

'Oh, Mr. Wynward,' she said, 'I think there can be little doubt of my sister's wretched fate. The experiment which you proposed has succeeded only too well.'

Horace had been down to Devonshire to question the two girls about their sister. He had been struck by Emily's likeness to his lost love, and had persuaded her aunt to bring her up to London, in

order to identify Levison by her means, and to test the effect which her appearance might produce upon the nerves of the suspected assassin.

The police were furnished with a complicated mass of evidence against Levison in his character of clerk, merchant, and bill-discounter; but the business was of a nature that entailed much delay, and after several adjourned examinations the prisoner fell desperately ill of heart disease, from which he had suffered for years, but which grew much worse during his imprisonment. Finding his death certain, he sent for Horace Wynward, and to him confessed his crime, boasting of his wife's death with a fiendish delight in the deed, which he called an act of vengeance against his rival.

'I knew you well enough when you came home, Horace Wynward,' he said, 'and I thought it would be my happy lot to compass your ruin. You trapped me, but to the last you have the worst of it. The girl you loved is dead. She dared to tell me that she loved you; defied my anger; told me that she had sold herself to me to save her father from disgrace, and confessed that she hated me, and had

always hated me. From that hour she was doomed. Her white face was a constant reproach to me. I was goaded to madness by her tears. She used to mutter your name in her sleep. I wonder I did not cut her throat as she lay there with the name upon her lips. But I must have swung for that. So I was patient, and waited till I could have her alone with me upon the mountains. It was only a push, and she was gone. I came home alone, free from the worry and fever of her presence—except in my dreams. She has haunted those ever since, with her pale face—yes, by heaven, I have hardly known what it is to sleep, from that hour to this, without seeing her white face, and hearing the one long shriek that went up to the sky as she fell.'

He died within a few days of this interview, and before his trial could take place. Time, that heals almost all griefs, brought peace by-and-by to Horace Wynward. He furnished the house in Mayfair, and for some time led a misanthropical life there; but on paying a second visit to Devonshire, where the two Daventry girls lived their simple industrious life in their aunt's school, he discovered that Emily's

the likeness to her sister made her very dear to him, and in the following year he brought a mistress to Crofton in the person of that young lady. Together they paid a mournful visit to that lonely spot in the Tyrol where Laura Levison had perished, and stayed there while a white marble cross was erected above her grave.

CHRISTMAS IN POSSESSION.

'But oh, Gus!' said a faltering voice, as two little white hands clung about the Captain's stalwart arm, 'suppose that dreadful man should do what he threatened, and there should be an execution!' And Captain Hawthornden's pretty, pale-faced wife shuddered, as if she had been talking of one of those sanguinary performances which, in the good old times of English history, were wont to attract crowds to Tower Hill.

'Nonsense, my love! there's not the remotest chance of such a thing,' cried the Captain, sturdily. 'Do you suppose if there were I'd go away and leave my precious petsy-wetsy in danger of falling into the hands of the Philistines?'

'And Toodleums!' exclaimed Mrs. Hawthorden, piteously. Toodleums was a pet name for that domestic miracle of beauty and genius, the first

baby. 'Imagine dreadful men taking away Toodleums' coral, that my own darling mother sent him!'

'I should like to see the bailiff that would put a finger on that coral!' cried the warrior, fiercely. 'But now let's talk dispassionately, my darling, for time's nearly up. It's half-past eleven. The express leaves King's Cross at 12.40, so my precious Clara must dry her pretty eyes and listen to her devoted Augustus.'

The devoted Augustus looked very handsome, and bright, and cheerful, as he bent over his tearful young wife, while two brisk little serving-maids scudded up and down stairs in quest of innumerable canes, overcoats, and courier bags, and a noble russia leather despatch-box, and skirmished with the cabman, who was groaning under the Captain's portmanteau and gun-case in the hall.

'You see, my darling, all we have to do is to look things in the face. Absalom holds a bill of mine which he refuses to renew—having, in point of fact, renewed it two or three times already—which cursed bond falls due on the 24th, Christmas Eve; the idea of any bloodsucking fellow having the

heart to refuse to renew a bill falling due on Christmas Eve! and the black-hearted scoundrel swears if it isn't paid he'll put in an execution upon these goods before the day is out. Was there ever such a dastard?'

'But you do owe him the money, don't you, Gus darling?'

'Well, yes, I owe him *some* of it, of course; but you can't call compound interest at forty per cent. a just debt.'

'But you knew what the interest was to be when you borrowed the money, didn't you, Gus darling?'

'Of course; the iniquitous rascal traded on my desperation. Women don't understand these things, you see, my love. However, scoundrel as I believe Absalom to be, I don't suppose him capable of putting in an execution on Christmas Eve, especially after the diplomatic letter I wrote him this morning. But I'll tell you what, Clara; be sure you let no stranger into the house on any pretence whatever. Sport the oak, my love, and tell your servants not to let a living creature cross the threshold.'

'Yes, dear, I'll tell them. And there's the butcher, and the grocer, and the baker, and even the milkman, Augustus dear. You don't know how insolent their young men have been lately; and, you see, you won't answer their letters, and that makes them angry.'

'Selfish bloodhounds!' cried the Captain; 'what the dooce do they want? Do they expect me to coin money? And upon my word, Clara, I don't think it's very generous on your part to torture me in this way, just as I'm off to spend Christmas with my uncle, Sir John Strathnairn—whose only son Douglas, a precious muff, by the way, stands between me and one of the oldest baronetcies and finest estates in North Britain—and am going to bore myself to death deer-stalking, and that kind of thing, entirely on your account; since this is about my only chance of squaring the old miser, and reconciling him to the idea of my imprudent marriage. It's positively selfish of you, Clara; and I hate selfishness.'

At this the young wife's tears flowed afresh. She was very young, very inexperienced, the fifth

daughter of a small gentleman farmer in Somersetshire, with no better fortune than her pretty face and bright winning manner. Augustus Hawthornden, late captain of hussars, had put the finishing stroke to a career of imprudence by falling in love with this bright hazel-eyed damsel, and marrying her off-hand, in his own impetuous way. This event had happened about eighteen months ago, immediately after the sale of the Captain's commission, the price of which he had anticipated to the last penny by means of his friends the money-lenders. Since this time the Captain and his wife had lived as mysteriously as the young ravens. They were now the inhabitants of a charming little villa at Kensington, prettily furnished by a crack West End upholsterer, and the proud and happy parents of an infant prodigy, whose laundress's account alone was no trifle, and whose baby-existence required to be sustained by the produce of one especial cow, charged extra in the dairyman's bill.

This was the aspect of affairs on the 21st of December, when Captain Hawthornden prepared to leave his Penates, on a journey to the extreme north

of Scotland, where he was to spend some weeks at the grim feudal castle of a fabulously rich uncle, Sir John Kilmarnock Strathnairn, from whom he hoped to obtain a new start in life.

'That's what I want, Clara,' he told his confiding little partner. 'The army was a mistake for a man with nothing but a beggarly younger son's portion of three hundred a year. As if any fellow in the 11th could live on his pay and a paltry three hundred a year! So, of course, I got my poor little estate mortgaged up to the eyes; and there's nothing left but the reversion to Toodleums, which no doubt he'll dispose of to the Jews before he gets it.'

Mrs. Hawthornden shook her head at this.

'Oh yes, he will, or he's not the Toodleums I take him for,' said the Captain, resolutely.

So it was that Augustus Lovat Hawthornden, scion of two good old Scottish houses, departed on his northern journey, with a view to softening the heart of his wealthy maternal uncle, and with a vague idea that Sir John Strathnairn would be induced to give him a start in some new profession —say the Church or the Bar. He knew fellows

who were doing wonders at the Bar; and he had heard of snug sinecures in the Church.

'Egad! if the worst comes to the worst, I suppose I must go in for a Government employment, and devote my mind to the investigation of the cattle plague, or the control of sewers, or some such low drudgery,' said the Captain.

So he caught his little wife in his arms, gave her a hearty kiss, and hurried off to the loaded cab that was to convey him on the first stage of his journey.

The tender young wife could not be satisfied with so brief a parting. She ran out to the cab, and there was a passionate clasping of hands, and murmured blessings made inaudible by sobs. And at the last—

'O Gus!' she cried, '*can* you go without kissing Toodleums?' And she beckoned to the little nurse, who was holding the baby up to his parents' view at a first-floor window.

'O, d—!' exclaimed the Captain, 'I can't lose the train for this kind of tomfoolery—King's Cross, cabby, as hard as you can pelt!'

The cruel cab horse went tearing off, and Mrs.

Hawthornden returned to the house with her pretty pale hair dishevelled by the bitter winter wind, and her face wet with more bitter tears. In the hall she met the cook, a fiery-faced young person, whom the inexperienced little wife always encountered with fear and trembling.

'Oh, if you please, ma'am,' said this domestic, in a breathless, gasping voice that was very alarming, 'did master leave the money for my wages—two quarters one month and three weeks azact—as you *said* you'd arst him?'

'No, Sarah,' faltered Mrs. Hawthornden; 'I'm sorry to say he could not settle *everything* this time; but directly he comes back from Scotland, he—I—I am sure all will be made right.'

'Settle everythink, indeed!' cried the cook, contemptuously. 'I should like to see anythink as *he* has settled. Settling ain't much in his way. Here have I been slaving myself to death in his service—and to wait on a gentleman that wants devilled kidneys and briled bones promiscous, for hisself and his friends, up to twelve o'clock at night and later, is not what I've been used to—going on three-

quarters of a year and never seen the colour of his money. And I can't stand it no longer. So, if you please, ma'am, I shall leave this afternoon; and if I can't get my doo by fair means, I must get it by foul; which summonsing at the County Court by his cook won't bring much credit on Captain Orthongding, I should think.'

'Oh, and if you please, mum, I should wish to leave at the same time as cook,' said the brisk young housemaid; 'not that I've got anythink to say agen you, ma'am, which you have always been a kind missus; but flesh and blood can't bear to be put off as we've been put off, and to be sworn at into the bargain without no more consideration than if we was Injy slaves.'

'Oh, very well, Sarah and Jane,' replied Mrs. Hawthornden, hopelessly, 'you must do as you please, and go away when you please. I am sure my husband will pay you to the last farthing if you can only wait patiently till his affairs are arranged; but if you can't——'

'No, mum, we can't,' answered the cook resolutely, 'We're tired of waiting. The line must be drawed

somewheres; and when the tradespeople declines to call for orders the time has come to draw it.'

Mrs. Hawthornden left the deserters and went upstairs.

'It was unkind of them to leave it till Gus was gone,' she thought; and then, with a thrill of horror, she considered what would happen if the nurse should also revolt. 'I can live without dinner, and I can do the housemaid's work myself,' she thought; 'but Baby is used to Hannah, and if she went away——'

The picture was too awful for contemplation. The poor little woman ran straight to the nursery—the pretty chamber which had been so daintily furnished in the days when, rich in the sense of an open account at the upholsterer's, the Captain had given his orders with a noble recklessness.

Here she found the nursemaid, a good-tempered looking girl of eighteen, bending over the pink-curtained bassinet.

'He's a little fretful with his teeth to-day, mum,' she said.

'Oh, Hannah,' cried Clara Hawthornden, casting

herself on her knees before this homely young person, 'you won't leave me, will you—you won't de-de-desert the baby?'

'Leave Toodleums, ma'am? Bless his dear little heart! I'd as soon cut my head off as leave him. Why, Mrs. Hawthornden, if you haven't been crying! Oh, do, please, mum, get up! What could have put such a notion into your pretty head? Oh, please, mum, don't take on so!'

'I can't help it, Hannah. The others are going, and I thought you would go too; and my darling would cry for you. Oh, Hannah, we shall be all alone in the house; and the tradespeople won't call any more till Captain Hawthornden's affairs are arranged, —and we shall have n-n-nothing to eat!'

'Oh, yes, we will, mum,' replied the dauntless Hannah. 'Don't you be downhearted, mum; we'll manage somehow, depend upon it.'

'I don't know, Hannah. In the hurry of his going away I forgot to ask my husband for a little ready money; and I haven't so much as a shilling to buy Baby's biscuits.'

The girl looked aghast at this.

'Oh, how I wish mamma would send me a hamper this Christmas!' said Mrs. Hawthornden, piteously. 'She sends one to my married sister, Mrs. Tozer, every year; but papa was so angry when I married Captain Hawthornden—it was a runaway match, you know, Hannah—that he won't let my name be mentioned at home; and I haven't a friend in the world except mamma, who daren't be kind to me for fear of papa.'

'Never you mind, mum,' replied Hannah, cheerfully; 'we'll get biscuits for Baby, and new milk for Baby, somehow, or my name's not Hannah Giles. Isn't there anything in the house I could take to ——?'

Here this excellent girl made a discreet and significant pause.

'Yes, Hannah, you good, faithful creature, I know what you mean. My jewellery has gone ever so long ago; all but this poor little wedding ring, and I could scarcely part with that—unless Toodleums were starving. But there's my cashmere shawl, and the silver-gray moire that I wear at dinner parties; and if you really wouldn't mind——'

'Lor' bless you, mum, not a bit! wait till after tea to-night. I know where to take them.'

'Bless you!' cried the disconsolate young wife; 'you're a true friend, Hannah.'

At this juncture mistress and maid were interrupted by the sudden awakening of Master Toodleums; and after this diversion they went downstairs to reconnoitre the enemy's country, Toodleums crowing and dribbling on his nurse's shoulder. Below all was desolation. Curiously they explored the snug little kitchen and offices, into which the timid young housekeeper had rarely ventured to intrude during the cook's stern dominion. Awful was the havoc revealed by the present investigation: broken crockery, bottomless saucepans, knife-blades without handles, forks without prongs, grease, rags, waste, ruin, were visible in every corner. The larder was bare of everything except the heel of a stale loaf and a box of sardines, the latter being a species of *hors d'œuvres* which the lower powers had not affected.

'Oh, Hannah, what can have become of the sirloin of beef we had for the late dinner yesterday?

Such a monstrous joint, too, as the cook ordered, though I told her a little piece of roast beef. Why you and I could have lived upon it for a week!'

'And cook has taken it off in her box, I dare say,' cried Hannah. 'Oh, the barefaced hussy!'

There was evidently nothing edible in the house except the sardines, so mistress and maid were fain to wait until the shades of evening should permit the faithful Hannah to execute that somewhat delicate transaction in relation to the silver-gray moire and the cashmere shawl.

'If you don't mind taking care of the baby for an hour, mum, I'll tidy up the kitchen a bit and get the tea-things ready; and then, while the kettle's boiling, I can run round to—where I spoke of; and get some tea and sugar, and a rasher or so of bacon, and Baby's biscuits, and a fancy loaf as I come back. I don't suppose you'll care much about dinner to-day, mum.'

'Dinner!' cried Mrs. Hawthornden; 'I feel as if I should never be able to eat anything more as long as I live. Oh, Gus, if you only knew what we have to go through! Oh, my precious popsy, when *you* grow

up and marry, you must never leave your poor little wife alone at Christmas-time, with all the debts unpaid, and everybody angry.'

This apostrophe was addressed to the six months' old infant, who looked supremely indifferent to the fond appeal. Mrs. Hawthornden took the child in her arms and went to the drawing-room, where she sat in a low chair by the dull fire, and indulged in that dismal refreshment which women call 'a good cry.'

She was very desolate, very miserable. The short winter day was already darkening, the prospect without looked bleak; but in the windows of other villas the firelight shone cheerily, and the lonely young wife thought sadly of happy families assembled in those rooms; families across whose hearth the dread spectre Insolvency had never cast his gloomy shadow. And then she thought of her own distant home. The good old-fashioned rooms, always made especially gay and pleasant at this season. The chintz room and the blue room, the oak room and the cedar parlour; the bright winter flowers, and ever-blossoming chintz curtains; the fires glowing

red on every hearth; the noble Worcester punch-bowl brought from its retirement; the chopping and mincing, and cake and pastry-making, and bustle of preparation in the housekeeper's room; the gardener coming into the kitchen with his pile of holly and mistletoe, laurel, and bay; the odour of Christmas that pervaded the house; and the dear friends with whom she might never spend that holy festival again.

'Oh, if papa could see me now, I don't think he could be angry with me any more,' she said to herself, despairingly.

For nearly two hours she sat alone, singing softly to her baby, and crying more or less almost all the time. And then Hannah came in with the tea-tray, and lighted candles, and the daintiest little dish of fried bacon, and Baby's biscuits, and a jug of milk for that young gentleman's consumption.

'It's all right, mum, one pound fifteen—fifteen on the shawl, and a pound on the *more;* but you'd never believe the trouble I had to screw him up to it. And he made me have a ticket for each. That's their artful way. I've heard father say they make mints

of money out of the tickets alone. And now do cheer up, and take your tea, that's a dear lady.'

The brisk little maiden stirred the fire, drew the curtains, arranged the table, and made all things as cheerful and pleasant as circumstances would permit. Her mistress insisted that she should share the meal; and the two took their tea together—the girl almost overcome by so great an honour, the young wife's thoughts speeding northward with the gallant Captain, who sat in the *coupé* of an express train, smoking Henry Clays, at eighteenpence apiece.

"Now don't you be downhearted, mum,' said the faithful handmaid, as she bade her mistress good night. 'I only spent three shillings this evening; and one pound twelve will carry us on till master comes home.'

This was comfort; but poor Clara had not forgotten the threatened horror of the 24th, Christmas Eve, that day to which she used to look forward at the dear old home, an old-fashioned festival enough, with its simple dissipations in the way of acted charades, snapdragon, and egg-flip.

'Oh, what a child I was!' she exclaimed; and

she had been indeed a joyous and innocent creature in those days. If she had been a calculating person, given to weigh advantages, and not the most unselfish and devoted of wives, she might have asked herself whether the proprietorship of a dashing *ci-devant* cavalry officer and his superb moustache was a privilege absolutely worth all it had cost her.

The dreaded 24th arrived, and the weary hours crept by with leaden feet. Every sound of a step in the street set Clara's heart beating. No ominous single knocks came to the door, except the faint appeal of a shivering dealer in boot-laces; for the angry tradespeople knew the Captain was away, and did not care to torment his helpless young wife uselessly, any more than they cared to supply her with goods without hope of payment. Even that long day wore itself out at last; and the mistress and maid took their tea and rasher again together before a cheerful fire, and discussed the probability that Mr. Absalom's stony heart had been melted by the softening influences of the season, and that there would be no execution.

'The very word is so dreadful,' said Mrs. Haw-

thornden ; 'and yet that's better than calling a cruel thing that makes a man prisoner an "attachment." I remember Augustus telling me he had an "attachment" out against him, and it didn't sound dreadful at all; but the very next week he was taken to Whitecross Street. I wonder what they are doing at home now?—at tea, I dare say. When I shut my eyes I can see them all sitting round the great fireplace. I wonder whether any one thinks of me? I do wish mamma had contrived to send me a hamper, with a home-made pound-cake, and some mince pies, and one of our famous geese; not on my own account, but on yours, Hannah, for you've been so good to me; and I should like you to have a nice Christmas dinner, and something to take home to your poor mother to-morrow evening. But I'm a famous goose to think of such a thing; for mamma couldn't send me a hamper without papa's knowledge, and he is so *dreadfully* angry with me.'

A sharp rat-tat, something between a single knock and a postman's, sounded on the door at this moment, and gave maid and mistress a kind of galvanic shock.

'Don't let any one in, Hannah,' cried Mrs. Hawthornden. 'My husband said we were not to admit a creature.'

Hannah had skipped to the window-curtains, and was peering out at the doorstep. She jumped back into the room as if she had been shot.

'Oh be joyful, mum!' she cried. 'You've got your wish. It's a 'AMPER!'

'No!'

'Yes, mum; and *such* a big one! Ain't it lovely! And mince pies, and pound-cake, and gooses too, I'll wager. And baby shall suck a bit of roast goose to-morrow, bless him! My brother Joe's baby ain't five months old yet, and will suck the gravy out of anything as well as if he was a grown man. Oh, won't we have a merry Christmas, mum—you, and me, and Baby? and ain't I glad that cross old cook's gone!'

'It's like magic!' exclaimed Mrs. Hawthornden, as the imitation postman's knock was repeated impatiently. 'Run to the door, Hannah. You're sure it *is* a hamper?'

Lor' bless your heart, mum, as if I didn't know

a Christmas 'amper when I see one!' and the girl flew into the little hall.

It was a foolish thing to be so moved, perhaps, by such a vulgar trifle as a Christmas hamper; but Clara Hawthornden wept tears of pleasure as she waited for the welcome basket. It was not of the famous home-reared goose or home-made mince pies she thought; but of the love that had contrived the gift, the tender motherly stratagems and plottings and contrivings that must have been gone through in order to compass the seasonable surprise.

'God bless the dear mother!' she murmured as she went out into the hall, where a queer-looking little old man was just depositing a noble hamper, the very straw oozing from the interstices of which looked quite appetizing. Mrs. Hawthornden was too much moved to remember that the little old man standing in the hall was there in direct disobedience of the Captain's solemn mandate that no stranger should be admitted within that door.

'Here is sixpence for yourself, my good man,' said Clara, politely. 'Good evening.' She looked towards the open door, gently indicating that the

old man could depart; but the old man, instead of so doing, gave a little whistle, and beckoned to some one without.

In the next moment a portly stranger stood on the threshold, gaily attired in a drab overcoat and olive-green trousers, and with gold chains and lockets twinkling on his expansive waistcoat.

'Sorry to have recourse to stratagem, miss,' said this gentleman, removing the newest of white hats from the blackest and curliest of *chevelures*, 'but really, you see, the Captain's one of those people with whom one must be deeper than Garrick. Here is my warrant, miss, all correct and regular, as you may perceive. Suit of Shadrach Absalom. This old gent and I will take an inventory, miss; and he can remain on the premises afterwards.'

'What!' cried Clara, growing very white; 'do you mean to say that hamper is not from my dear mother at Somerton Manor?'

'That hamper, my dear young lady, is like the wooden horse that went into Troy. Don't trouble yourself to open it, my good girl; there's nothing but straw inside, and a brickbat or two just to give

it solidity. All stratagems are fair in love and war, and the recovery of a just debt, especially when a bill has been renewed three times, as this one has. Shadrach Absalom is my first cousin, miss, and as good a fellow as ever lived; but the Captain has really been too bad.'

'I'm sure my husband means to pay everything when he comes from Scotland, where he has gone to visit his uncle, Sir John Straithnairn,' faltered the horror-stricken Clara.

'What, do you mean to say that Captain Hawthornden has got such a pretty young creature as you for his wife, and that he can have the heart to go away and leave you to bear the brunt of his difficulties?' cried Laurence Absalom, the sheriff's officer, with honest indignation.

'I beg, sir, that you will not remark upon my husband's conduct. He always acts for the best. Oh, Hannah, what are we to do?'

'I know what I should like to do,' answered the handmaiden, spitefully; 'and that is to scratch that nasty, deceiving old man's face.'

'If you could scratch some of the dirt off it you'd

be doing him a service, my dear,' said Mr. Laurence Absalom, with easy good nature, while the old man sat quietly on the delusive hamper, the picture of grimy meekness.

Mr. Absalom called for a candle, and proceeded to explore the house, attended by the meek old man, who wiped his dirty face upon the dingiest of blue cotton handkerchiefs, and breathed very hard as he followed his commanding officer. Together the two men ransacked drawers and wardrobes, peered into chiffoniers, and violated the sanctity of writing desks, and carefully catalogued furniture and bedding, books and electro-plate china and glass, table linen and pictures. All Clara's pretty dresses, her dainty ribbons and laces, her coquettish little bonnets and innocent girlish jackets, were set down on a sheet of greasy foolscap, while the two women looked on, one of them utterly helpless and miserable, wondering what would come next.

At last the inventory was complete; and Mr. Absalom prepared to take his departure.

'Of course you'll be writing to the Captain, ma'am,' he said; 'and you'll please tell him that unless that

business is squared in five days' time his property will go to the hammer. I'm sure I'm very sorry on your account; but, you see, the Captain knew what he had to expect, and he really ought to have provided against it. Good evening, Mrs. Hawthornden. The old gent will stay till the sale. You'll find him very quiet.'

'What!' cried Clara, aghast, 'is that dreadful old man to stop in the house?'

The dreadful old man gave a grunt of assent.

'Upon my word, ma'am, I wish I was the party,' said Mr. Absalom, gallantly; 'I should consider it quite a privilege; but old Jiffins does that part of the work, and you'll find him as harmless as an old spaniel, if you don't mind his appetite; that is rather alarming, I admit. Good night.'

And with an easy nod Mr. Laurence Absalom departed, leaving the mistress and maid staring in consternation at the man in possession, who was refreshing himself with a pinch of snuff out of a screw of paper. He certainly was by no means a prepossessing individual; indeed, it is impossible to imagine grubbiness more dingy than the

grubbiness of this old man's aspect. He wore a long great coat, and of shirt or shirt collar there were no traces visible; but in lieu of these conventionalities he displayed a dirty wisp of neckerchief that had once been white, but which was now a sickly yellow. His boots seemed to have been the dress boots of a giant, and were wrinkled like the skins of French plums. On one hand he wore a roomy black glove, also of the texture of French plums. His gray hair straggled over the greasy velvet collar of his coat, in an eminently patriarchal fashion, and his bottle nose—nay, indeed, his complexion generally—was of that rubicund hue produced by copious consumption of malt and spirituous liquors, in conjunction with exposure to all kinds of weather. Such as he was, he seemed to Mrs. Hawthornden the living embodiment of a nightmare. She stood rooted to the ground, staring at him hopelessly and helplessly; and it was only the brisk Hannah who aroused her from this waking trance.

'Hadn't the old gentleman better step into master's study?' suggested the girl. 'He'll want to sit somewhere, you see, ma'am.'

'To sit? yes, and he is going to live here. Oh, Hannah, *what* shall we do?'

'Don't you be frightened, mum,' whispered the girl; 'I've lived where there's been a man in possession, and it's nothing when you're used to it. Step this way, if you please, sir,' she added, briskly, and she pointed to a little box of a room opposite the drawing-room.

The old man walked to the door of this apartment, then suddenly turned back and approached Mrs. Hawthornden, who quailed before him. To her horror he lifted his dirty hand and laid it—oh, so gently!—on her soft hair, patting her head as if she had been a child.

'Don't you be frightened, my pretty!' he said; 'I've seen a deal of trouble in my time, and I can feel for them as have their homes broke up, though it *is* my business to break 'em. It's the business that's hard-hearted, my pretty, not me. You bear that in mind, and don't you worry yourself about old Jiffins no more than if he was a old tomcat. He'll keep his place, depend upon it, and won't give no trouble to no one.'

'I'm sure you're very kind,' murmured Clara half crying; 'but it does seem so dreadful!'

'Of course it do, to a sweet young creatur' like you. But Lor' bless you, mum, there's places I go to reg'lar, as you may say, and where I'm quite like one of the fambly. The children calls me uncle. "Crikey, father!" cries one of the little chaps, "if here ain't Uncle Jiffins come back agen!" and they're quite took aback to find their parents ain't over-glad to see me. I suppose there ain't no objections to a pipe in this here room, ma'am?'

'Oh, no, no, no,' cried Clara, piteously, 'you can smoke as much as you like; and there's some of my husband's Turkish tobacco in that jar on the mantelpiece, which you can take if you please.'

'Thank you, mum. Shag's more in my way; but if you could put your hand upon a little bit of Cavendish, I should take it very kind.'

A piece of Cavendish tobacco was found, after some little trouble, and Mr. Jiffins ensconced himself in Augustus Hawthornden's easy chair—a charming chair, in which the Captain had been wont to read the papers and ponder somewhat gloomily on

financial questions; and Mr. Jiffins being duly established in this room, which was conveniently close to the hall door, and in a manner commanded the whole house, Mrs. Hawthornden and Hannah went back to the drawing-room, where Toodleums, happily unconscious of this domestic revolution, was still slumbering placidly in his bassinet.

Together the mistress and maid sat down to face life with its new responsibilities.

'I'll write to Augustus this very night, Hannah; but my letter can't go till to-morrow—perhaps not even then, as it's Christmas Day; and a letter takes such a time travelling to the Highlands; and then there would be the journey back; and oh, dear! when will Gus come to send that awful old creature away? He doesn't seem unkind, but oh, so dirty! And to think that he should be sitting in Gus's favourite chair, with his head against the antimacassar that I worked with my own hands!'

Happily the brisk little nursemaid was too cheery a creature to be altogether discomfited even by a man in possession. She gave the baby refreshment from a bottle furnished with a wonderful gutta-percha

machine, which made the feeding business look very much like laying on gas; and then she reminded her mistress that it was getting late, and shops might be closing in the neighbourhood.

'There's to-morrow's dinner, you see, mum; and then there's the old gent's supper. I suppose I'd better get a bit of cheese?'

'Oh, good gracious me!' cried Clara, 'will he want supper?'

'Lor' bless your innocence, mum, of course he will, and breakfast and dinner, and all his meals, and his beer. It's the rule, you see, mum: you finds 'em in everythink.'

With this Hannah handed her mistress the baby, and departed.

The inexperienced girl-wife sat staring apathetically at the blackened coals in the pretty steel grate. She felt as some young mother of the antediluvian period may have felt, as she sat with her child in her lap, listening to the rising waters, and waiting for the end of the world.

Hannah came back by-and-by, with bread and cheese and beer for the old man, and a modest little

joint of beef for the next day's dinner, and a quarter of a pound of tea, and other small matters, which altogether made a terrible hole in that one pound twelve shillings which alone stood between this household and destitution.

'We shall have to change the half sovereign for his beer to-morrow, mum,' said the maiden; 'but we shall hold out till the Captain comes home, depend upon it.'

Mrs. Hawthornden counted the hours that must elapse before the Captain could possibly come home, and counted them over again, till her brain grew dizzy. Her only comfort next morning was to think that some of those weary hours were gone.

Hannah waited on Mr. Jiffins, taking his meals to the Captain's snug little sanctum, and coming back to her mistress to report the awful havoc he had made with the loaf, or the alarming way he had slashed off slices from the joint.

'And I think if there was oceans of gravy, mum, he'd soak them up; for, let alone smashing his purtaters, he sops it up with his bread.'

Oh, what a dreary Christmas Day! Cabs and

carriages dashed up to other houses in the pretty suburban street; gaily dressed people went to and fro the neighbouring churches; at night music sounded and lights gleamed from many windows while Clara Hawthornden walked up and down with her fretful baby and thought of what they were doing at home—alas, her home no longer!

Toodleums had been fractious all day, and grew worse towards evening; and while Hannah went for the supper beer he took the opportunity of working himself into a paroxysm of crying that terrified the young mother out of her wits. She was pacing the room, trying in vain to soothe her infant, when the door was softly opened, and Mr. Jiffins appeared. Clara almost dropped the baby at sight of this apparition.

'Let me take him a bit,' said Mr. Jiffins, 'I'm used to babies, bless 'um.'

'Oh, please don't!' cried Clara, as the dreaded intruder advanced his grimy hands; 'indeed, indeed he wouldn't come to you.'

But, to the mother's utter astonishment, Toodleums, the most particular and capricious of babies,

did go to this grubby old man, and, after a few minutes' hushing and dandling and see-sawing in the air, did actually cease to cry.

'Bless their dear little hearts! they all come to *me*,' said Mr. Jiffins, complacently. 'I've got a grandson just this one's size; and what that little dear do suffer with the wind on his stomach is only beknown to hisself and me. It ain't temper, bless you, when they skreeks like that—it's wind; and you take my advice, and just let your gal fetch twopenn'orth of essence of peppermint—none of your Daffy for my money—and give him two drops on a lump of sugar melted in a spoonful of warm water, and he'll be as quiet as a lamb.'

Mr. Jiffins nursed the baby till Hannah came back with the beer and the change for that last half sovereign, which Mrs. Hawthornden had contemplated fondly as she parted with it for ever. The girl stared aghast on beholding her charge in the arms of the intruder; but he despatched her to the chemist's for peppermint as coolly as if he had been the infant's favourite grandfather. Mrs. Hawthornden had sunk exhausted into her chair,

and looked on with amazement while the man in possession developed a perfect genius for nursing, and entertained Toodleums with a broken tobacco-pipe and a latch-key as that young gentleman rarely allowed himself to be entertained by the most elaborate inventions of the toy-maker.

'You seem to have a wonderful power over children,' murmured Clara at last.

'I'm fond of 'em, ma'am, that's where it is; and they knows it. There's nothing gets over 'em like that,—real rightdown fondness of 'em. Now, I'll wager while you was carrying this little chap up and down just now, your mind had wandered like, and you was thinking of your own troubles, and you felt him a drag upon you.'

Clara nodded assent.

'*To* be sure!' exclaimed Mr. Jiffins, triumphantly; 'and that child knowed it,—he knowed as he hadn't got your whole heart; and you can't do nothink with a child unless you gives him your whole heart. They're the deepest little Garricks out for that, bless 'em!—Ain't you now, ducksy? Yes, o' course; you knows you is.'

Toodleums assented to this proposition with a rapturous crow.

'Bein' as it's Christmas night, mum,' said Mr. Jiffins by and by, when the peppermint had been brought and administered, 'and my disposition lively like, perhaps you wouldn't take it as a liberty if I asked leave to eat my bit of supper in here? It *is* rather lonesome in that there little room, and seems lonesomer being Christmas-time.'

What could a helpless young wife and mother say to this startling request? Mr. Jiffins was master of the situation. There was something very dreadful in sitting down to supper with this dirty old man; but Toodleums was hanging on to one of his greasy coat-buttons with the affection of a lifetime, and a man thus affected by Toodleums could not be utterly base. So Mrs. Hawthornden murmured a faint assent to the proposed arrangement. The tray was brought, modestly furnished with a piece of cheese, a loaf, a little glass dish of butter, and a jug of ale. Mr. Jiffins surveyed these simple preparations with an approving eye.

'Raw cheese is rather cold to the palate in this

weather,' he said, thoughtfully; 'what should you say now, mum, to a rabbit?'

'I am very sorry,' faltered Mrs. Hawthornden, apologetically, 'but we haven't any rabbits in the house.'

'Lor' bless you, ma'am, I means toasted cheese. If that good-tempered young woman of yours would get me the mustard-pot and a small saucepan, and then kneel down before the fire and toast a round or two of bread, I'd soon show you what I means by a rabbit.'

Hannah ran off to procure these articles, and she was presently employed in toasting cheese under the old man's direction.

'A teaspoonful of mustard, and a good lump of fresh butter, and a tablespoonful of ale, and let it simmer by the side of the fire while you toastes the bread, my dear,' said Mr. Jiffins, who nursed the baby, and looked on approvingly while the hand maid obeyed him.

To poor Clara Hawthornden it seemed like some distempered dream. 'If anybody should call!' she thought; and she had to tell herself over and over

again that ten o'clock on Christmas night was not a likely hour for callers. She thought of the joyous party in her old home—the girls in white muslin and scarlet sashes, the matrons in their rustling silks: and then of that more stately festival at Strathnairn Castle, and the black oak buffets loaded with gold plate, which her husband had so often described to her; but from these bright pictures her fancy always came back to the old man superintending the simmering cheese.

Both he and Hannah persuaded her presently to taste this delicacy. She had eaten nothing at dinner, for the sense of the old man's presence in the Captain's study had weighed upon her like an actual burden. He was not nearly so dreadful seated opposite to her with her baby on his knee. Our skeletons are never so hideous when confronted boldly as when hidden away in some dark cupboard. Mrs. Hawthornden tasted the Welsh rarebit. It was really excellent. She remembered having heard Augustus talk of eating such things at Evans's. And presently she found herself eating this toasted cheese with more appetite than anything she had tasted

since her husband's departure. Though familiar, Mr. Jiffins was not utterly wanting in reverence. He resigned the baby to Hannah, and insisted on taking his supper at the remotest corner of the table, where there was no tablecloth. The edge of the tablecloth he seemed to consider the line of demarcation; no persuasion could induce him to infringe upon it by the breadth of a hair. But at this uncomfortable corner he ate his supper with a relish that was almost contagious, and talked a good deal in a pleasant chirping manner, as he quaffed his ale. After supper he ventured upon a conundrum, and that being approved, upon another; and Mrs. Hawthornden found herself laughing quite merrily, but still with the sense that it was all a distempered dream. Dreadful as it was to be cheerful in the company of a nursemaid and of a broker's man, it was perhaps better for this lonely little wife than brooding over her woes. She slept quite soundly after the toasted cheese and the conundrums, and awoke next morning to find the cheerful Hannah at her bedside with a neatly-arranged little breakfast-tray.

'It was Mr. Jiffins as told me to bring you up your breakfast, ma'am. "Let her sleep a little late, poor pretty!" he said, "and take her a cup of tea and a new-laid egg when she wakes;" and—*would you believe it,* mum?—the old dear goes and fetches the egg hisself, while I biles the kettle, though he told me it was as much as his employment was worth to step outside our door! And if he hasn't been and hearthstoned the steps before I was up, mum, and swep' the kitchen beautiful—for a handier old man I never did see; and he says, if you could pick a bit of Irish stew for your dinner, he's a rare hand at one.'

Mrs. Hawthornden did not care to pick a bit of Irish stew, nor did she affect any dish in the preparation of which the broker's man could be manipulatively engaged; but she fully appreciated his kind wish to help her and her faithful handmaiden, and thanked him prettily for his kindness when she encountered him downstairs. Before long she had still greater reason to thank him; for Toodleums suffered severely in the cutting of an upper tooth, and both nursemaid and mother profited by grand-

father Jiffins' experience. The days went by slowly, but no longer made hideous to Clara Hawthornden by her horror of Jiffins, who, instead of an incubus, had proved himself an elderly angel in the house. Her chief trouble now arose from her husband's silence. The fifth day must soon elapse, and then there would be a sale, and she and her child would be turned out of doors, homeless, shelterless. No, not quite. Here Providence interposed in the humble guise of Jiffins.

'My married daughter's got a room as she lets, and as is now empty; and if they've the heart to turn you out of here, you can go there and welcome,' said this dingy benefactor. 'There ain't no spring sofys, nor shiny steel grates; but it's that clean you might eat your victuals off the floor; and, if you don't mind a mews, it's respectable.'

A mews! where would not the desolate mother have gone to obtain shelter for her baby?

'Oh, Mr. Jiffins!' she cried, clasping one of those grimy hands, which had once inspired her with such aversion, 'what should we do without you?'

What, indeed! The last shilling of that last half sovereign had been spent two days ago, and since then the little household had been sustained by money advanced by Jiffins.

'You'll pay me fast enough one of these odd days, I dessay,' said Jiffins, when Clara deprecated this last obligation.

For the first time since she had left her home she wrote to ask a favour from her mother. The boon she demanded was a five-pound note, wherewith to pay and reward Jiffins. Never before had she allowed the home-friends to know that her Augustus left her with one wish ungratified.

The fifth day expired. The hour of doom was near. Strange men in paper caps came to take up the carpets. The dear little china closet, in which Clara had so delighted, when the housemaid would allow her to enter it, was rifled of its contents, and dinner services, tea services, and glass were spread on the dining-room table. Bills were stuck on the outside of the house; within, nasty little bits of paper, with numbers on them, were pasted upon every article, even—oh, bitterest drop in this cup of bitter-

ness!—on the sacred bassinet of Toodleums, still a martyr to his teeth. Ignominy could go no further; and there were still no tidings of the Captain. But for Jiffins and Hannah, Clara Hawthornden must surely have died of this agony.

It was the very morning of the sale. Mr. Absalom was there in all his glory. The auctioneer had arrived. Dingy men with greasy little memorandum-books pervaded the house. Clara sat with Hannah and the baby in the little study, where strange faces peered in upon them every now and then; and intending buyers made heartless remarks about the curtains, and informed the dingy commission agents how high they were disposed to bid for the Captain's pet chair. There was no corner of the house sacred to the homeless woman's despair. Clara felt that it would have been almost better to sit in the street. The most unfriendly doorstep would have been a more peaceful resting-place than this.

Alas! in this bitter crisis even the faithful Jiffins could no longer protect her. He was sent hither and thither by the higher powers, and could not yet snatch half an hour's respite in which to conduct

Mrs. Hawthornden to the humble lodging he had secured for her.

'Oh, Hannah, I wish Mr. Jiffins would take us away from all these dreadful people!' Clara cried, piteously. She had ceased to hope for rescue from Augustus. *That* ship had foundered, and Jiffins was the lifeboat of benevolence that must carry her to the shore of safety.

'Oh, Hannah, if he would only take us to his daughter's house in the mews!' she cried; and in the next moment a hansom tore up to the door, a stentorian voice broke out into exclamations of surprise and indignation, interspersed with execrations. A shrill scream burst from the young wife's pale lips.

'Gus!' she cried, while Toodleums set up a sympathetic shriek; 'Oh, thank God, thank God!' and she must have fallen but for Hannah's supporting arms.

Yes, it was the Captain, dressed in black, and with a crape hatband. He distributed his anathemas freely as he strode into the villa. What the dash is the meaning of this dashed business? Take down

those dashed bills, and turn these dashed people out of the house; and so on. Mr. Absalom advanced politely, and suggested that if the Captain would be so kind as to settle that little matter of 326*l.* 17*s.* 6*d.* the sale need not proceed. The Captain pulled out a brand-new cheque book and signed his first cheque upon a brand new banking account, which document he handed to Mr. Absalom with an injured air.

'You ought to have known better, Absalom,' he said, 'after all our past dealing.'

'To tell you the truth, Captain, it was my experience of the past that made me rather sharp in the present,' replied the other, politely.

'Come, Clara, don't cry,' exclaimed Captain Hawthornden to the poor little woman, who was sobbing on his shoulder. 'I didn't get your letter till yesterday afternoon, and have been travelling ever since. I was away with a party in the mountains. And there's been a dreadful piece of work at Strathnairn —my cousin Douglas, Sir John's only son, killed by the explosion of his rifle. No one to blame but himself, poor beg—poor dear fellow! Sir John's awfully cut up, as well he may be; and I'm next heir to the

title and estates. Yes, little woman, you'll be Lady Strathnairn before you die; for my uncle will never marry, poor old boy! Very dreadful, ain't it, poor Douglas's death? but, of course, uncommonly jolly for us.'

'Oh, Gus, how awful for Sir John! But, thank Heaven, you have come back! You can never understand what I've suffered; and if it hadn't been for Mr. Jiffins——'

'Jiffins! who the deuce is Jiffins?'

'The man in possession. He has been so good to us—has lent us money even; and but for him we must have starved.'

'Good Heavens, Clara!' cried the Captain, aghast, you don't mean to say you've degraded yourself by borrowing money from a broker's man?'

'What could I do, dear? You left me without any money, you know,' replied the wife, innocently.

'You really ought to have known better, Clara,' said the Captain, sternly. 'But where is this Jiffins? Let me pay the fellow his confounded loan.'

'I think you'd better let me pay it, dear. If you'll give me a ten-pound note, I can make it all right.'

So Mr. Jiffins received about a thousand per cent. for his loan, which had been little more than a sovereign, and he spent New Year's Day very pleasantly in the bosom of his married daughter's household, No. 7½, Stamford Mews, Blackfriars. But perhaps at some future audit, when many such small accounts are balanced before the Great Auditor, Mr. Jiffins may receive even more than a thousand per cent. for that little loan.

JOHN GRANGER.

A GHOST STORY.

CHAPTER I.

'THEN there is no hope for me, Susy?'

The speaker was a stalwart young fellow of the yeoman class, with a grave, earnest face, and a frank, fearless manner. He was standing by the open window of a pleasant farmhouse parlour, by the side of a bright-eyed girl, who was leaning with folded arms upon the broad window-sill, looking shyly downwards as he talked to her.

'Is there no chance, Susy! none? Is it all over between us?'

'If you mean that I shall ever cease to think of you as one of the best friends I have in this world, John, no,' she answered; 'or that I shall ever cease

to look up to you as the noblest and truest of men, no, John—a hundred times no.'

'But I mean something more than that, Susy, and you know it as well as I do. I want you to be my wife by-and-by. I'm not in a hurry, you know, my dear. I can bide my time. You're very young yet, and may be you scarcely know your own mind. I can wait, Susy. My love will stand wear and tear. Let me have the hope of winning you by-and-by. I'm not a poor man at this present time, you know, Susy. There are three thousand pounds of old uncle Tidman's on deposit in my name in Hillborough Bank. I've been a lucky fellow in having an industrious father and a rich bachelor uncle, and with the chance of you for my wife, a few years would make me a rich man.'

'That can never be, John. I know how proud I ought to be that you should think of me like this. I'm not worthy of so much love. It isn't that I don't appreciate your merits, John; but——'

'There's some one else, eh, Susy?'

'Yes, John,' she faltered, in a very low voice, and with a vivid blush on her drooping face.

'Some one who has asked you to be his wife?'

'No, John; but I think he likes me a little, and——'

Here she stopped suddenly, finding the sentence difficult to continue.

John Granger gave a long, heavy sigh, and stood for some minutes looking at the ground in dead silence.

'I think I can guess who it is,' he said at last; 'Robert Ashley, — eh, Susy?' The blush grew deeper, and the girl's silence was a sufficient answer. 'Well, he's a fine handsome young fellow, and more likely to take a pretty girl's fancy than such a blunt, plain-spoken chap as I am; and he's a good fellow enough, as far as I know; I've nothing to say against him, Susy. But there's one man in the world I should have liked to warn you against, Susan, if I'd thought there was a shadow of a chance you'd ever listen to any love-making of his.'

'Who is that, John?'

'Your cousin, Stephen Price.'

'You needn't fear that I should ever listen to

him, John. There's little love lost between Stephen and me.'

'Isn't there? I've heard him swear that he'd have you for his wife some day, Susan. I don't like him, my dear, and I don't trust him either. It isn't only that he bears a bad character up town, as a dissipated, pleasure-loving spendthrift; there's something more than that; something below the surface that I can't find words for. I know that he's very clever. Folks say that Mr. Vollair the lawyer looks over all his faults on account of his cleverness, and that he never had a clerk to serve him so well as Stephen does. But cleverness and honesty don't always go together, Susy, and I fear that cousin of yours will come to a bad end.'

Susan Lorton did not attempt to dispute the justice of this opinion. Stephen Price was no favourite of hers, in spite of those good looks and that showy cleverness which had won him a certain amount of popularity elsewhere.

John Granger lingered at the sunny window, where the scent of a thousand roses came floating in upon the warm summer air. He lingered as if loth

to go and make an end of that interview; though the end must come, and the last words must needs be spoken very soon.

'Well, well, Susy,' he said presently, 'a man must teach himself to bear these things, even when they seem to break his life up somehow, and make an end of every hope and dream he ever had. I can't tell you how I've loved you, my dear—how I shall love you to the end of my days. Bob Ashley is a good fellow, and God grant he may make you a good husband! But I don't believe it's in him to love you as I do, Susan. He takes life pleasantly, and has his mind full of getting on in the world, you see, and he has father and mother and sisters to care for. I've got no one but you to love, Susan. I've stood quite alone in the world ever since I was a boy, and you've been all the world to me. It's bitter to bear, my dear; but it can't be helped. Don't cry, Susy darling. I'm a selfish brute to talk like this, and bring the tears into those pretty eyes. It can't be helped, my dear. Providence orders these things, you see, and we must bear them quietly. Good-bye, dear.'

He gave the girl his big, honest hand. She took it in both her own, bent over it, and kissed it tearfully.

'You'll never know how truly I respect you John,' she said. 'But don't say good-bye like that. We are to be friends always, aren't we?'

'Friends always? Yes, my dear; but friends at a distance. There's some things I couldn't bear to see. I can wish for your happiness, and pray for it honestly; but I couldn't stop at Friarsgate to see you Robert Ashley's wife. My lease of the old farm is out. I'm to call on Mr. Vollair this afternoon to talk about renewing it. I fancied you'd be mistress of the dear old place, Susy. That's been my dream for the last three years. I couldn't bear the look of the empty rooms now that dream's broken. I shall surrender the farm at once, and go to America, I've got a capital that 'll start me anywhere, and I'm not afraid of work. I've old friends out there too; my first cousin, Jim Lomax, and his wife. They went out five years ago, and have been doing wonders with a farm in New England. I shan't feel quite strange there.'

'Go to America, John, and never come back!' said Susan, despondently.

She had a sincere regard for this honest yeoman, and was grieved to the heart at the thought of the sorrow that had come to him through his unfortunate desire to be something more to her than a friend.

'Never's a long word, Susy,' he answered, in his serious straightforward way. 'Perhaps when a good many years have gone over all our heads, and when your children are beginning to grow up, I may come back and take my seat beside your hearth, and smoke my pipe with your husband. Not that I should ever cease to love you, my dear; but time would take the sting out of the old pain, and it would be only a kind of placid sorrow, like the thought of one that's long been dead. Yes, I shall come back to England after ten or fifteen years, if I live, if it's only for the sake of seeing your children —and I'll wager there 'll be one amongst them that 'll take to me almost as if it was my own, and will come to be like a child to me in my old age. I've seen such things. And now I must say good-bye, Susy; for I've got to be up town at three o'clock to

see Mr. Vollair, and I've a deal of work to do before I leave.'

'Shall you go soon, John?'

'As soon as ever I can get things settled—the farm off my hands, and so on. But I shall come to say good-bye to you and your father before I go.'

'Of course you will, John. It would be unfriendly to go without seeing father. Good-bye!'

They shook hands once more and parted. The yeoman walked slowly along the little garden path, and across a patch of furze-grown common land, on the other side of which there was a straggling wood of some extent, broken up here and there by disused gravel-pits and pools of stagnant water—a wild kind of place to pass at night, yet considered safe enough by the country people about Hillborough, as there was scarcely any part of it that was not within earshot of the high road. The narrow foot-path across this wood was a short cut between Matthew Lorton's farm and Hillborough, and John Granger took it.

He walked with a firm step and an upright

bearing, though his heart was heavy, as he went townwards that afternoon. He was a man to bear his trouble in a manly spirit, whatever it might be, and there were no traces of his disappointment in his looks or manner when he presented himself at the lawyer's house.

Mr. Vollair had a client with him; so John Granger was ushered into the clerks' office, where he found Stephen Price hard at work at a desk, in company with a smaller and younger clerk.

'Good afternoon, Granger,' he said, in a cool patronizing manner that John Granger hated; 'come about your lease, of course?'

'There is nothing else for me to come about.'

'Ah, you see, you're one of those lucky fellows who never want the help of the law to get you out of a scrape. And you're a devilish lucky fellow, too, in the matter of this lease, if you can get Friarsgate for a new term at the rent you've been paying hitherto, as I dare say you will, if you play your cards cleverly with our governor presently.'

'I am not going to ask for a new lease,' answered John Granger; 'I am going to leave Friarsgate.'

'Going to leave Friarsgate! You astound me. Have you got a better farm in your eye?'

'I am going to America.'

Stephen Price gave expression to his astonishment by a prolonged whistle, and then twisted himself round upon his stool, the better to regard Mr. Granger.

'Why, Granger, how is this?' he asked. 'A fellow like you, with plenty of money, going off to America! I thought that was the refuge for the destitute.'

'I'm tired of England, and I've a fancy for a change. I hear that a man may do very well in America, with a good knowledge of farming and a tidy bit of capital.'

'Ah, and you've got that,' said Stephen Price, with an envious sigh. 'And so you're thinking of going to America? That's very strange. I used to fancy you were sweet upon a certain pretty cousin of mine. I've seen you hanging about old Lorton's place a good deal of late years.'

John Granger did not reply to this remark. Mr. Vollair's client departed a few minutes later, and

Mr. Granger was asked to step into the lawyer's office. He found his business very easy to arrange in the manner he wished. Mr. Vollair had received more than one offer for Friarsgate farm, and there was an applicant who would be glad to get the place as soon as John Granger could relinquish it, without waiting for the expiration of his lease. This incoming tenant would no doubt be willing to take his furniture and live and dead stock at a valuation, Mr. Vollair told John. So the young farmer left the office in tolerable spirits, pleased to find there were no obstacles to his speedy departure from a home that had once been dear to him.

END OF VOL II.

J. AND W. RIDER, PRINTERS, LONDON.

WEAVERS AND WEFT

And other Tales

BY THE AUTHOR OF

LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET

ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

LONDON
JOHN MAXWELL AND CO.
4, SHOE LANE, FLEET STREET
1877
[*All rights reserved.*]

CONTENTS TO VOL. III.

JOHN GRANGER—

CHAP. PAGE

II. 1

III. 13

PRINCE RAMJI ROWDEDOW 36

TOO BRIGHT TO LAST 61

THE SCENE-PAINTER'S WIFE 107

SIR LUKE'S RETURN 129

HER LAST APPEARANCE—

I. Her Temptation 187

II. Her Avenger 201

III. Her Farewell Sigh 210

SIR HANBURY'S BEQUEST—

I. In the Hexam Library 219

II. The Hexam Estate 230

III. The Dream Picture 237

IV. Dorothea 244

V. How the Dream came True 258

A VERY NARROW ESCAPE 263

MY UNLUCKY FRIEND 290

WEAVERS AND WEFT.

JOHN GRANGER.

CHAPTER II.

JOHN GRANGER'S preparations and arrangements, the disposal of his property, and the getting together of his simple outfit, occupied little more than three weeks; and it was still bright midsummer weather when he took his last walk round the pastures of Friarsgate, and, for the first time since he had resolved to leave those familiar scenes, realized how great a hold they had upon his heart.

'It 'll be dreary work in a strange country,' he thought, as he leaned upon a gate, looking at the lazy cattle which were no longer his, and wondering

whether they would miss him when he was gone; 'and what pleasure can I ever take in trying to get rich!—I who have no one to work for, no one to take pride in my success? Perhaps it would have been better to stay here, even though I had to hear her wedding bells some fine summer morning, and see her leaning on Robert Ashley's arm, and looking up in his face as I used to fancy she would look up to me in all the years to come. O God, how I wish I was dead! What an easy end that would make of everything!'

He thought of the men and women who had died of a fever last autumn round about Hillborough—people who had wished to live, for whom life was full of duties and household joys; whose loss left wide gaps among their kindred, not to be filled again upon this earth. If death would come to him, what a glad release! It was not that he suffered from any keen or violent agony; it was the dull blankness of his existence which he felt—an utter emptiness and hopelessness; nothing to live for in the present, nothing to look forward to in the future.

This was the last day. His three great sea chests, containing his clothes, books, and other property which he could not bring himself to part with, had gone on to London by that morning's luggage train. He had arranged to follow himself by the night mail, which left Hillborough Station at half-past nine, and would be in London at two o'clock next morning. At the last he had been seized with a fancy for prolonging his time to the uttermost, and it was for this reason he had chosen the latest train by which he could leave Hillborough. He had a good many people to take leave of, and it was rather trying work. He had always been liked and respected, and on this last day it surprised him to find how fond the people were of him, and how general was the regret caused by his departure. Little children clung about his knees, matronly eyes were dried in lavender cotton aprons, pretty girls offered blushingly to kiss him at parting; stalwart young fellows, his companions of old, declared they would never have a friend they could trust and honour as they had trusted and honoured him. It touched the poor fellow to the heart to

find himself so much beloved. And he was going to sacrifice all this, because he could not endure to live in the old home now his dream was broken.

He had put off his visit to Matthew Lorton's house to the very last. His latest moments at Hillborough should be given to Susan, he told himself. He would drain to the last drop the cup of that sweet, sad parting. His last memory of English soil should be her bright tender face looking at him compassionately, as she had looked the day she broke his heart.

It was half-past seven when he went in at the little garden gate. A warm summer evening, the rustic garden steeped in the low western sunshine; the birds singing loud in hawthorn and sycamore; a peaceful vesper calm upon all things. John Granger had been expected. He could see that at a glance. The best tea-things were set out in the best parlour, and Mr. Lorton and his daughter were waiting tea for him. There was a great bunch of roses on the table, and Susan was dressed in light blue muslin, with a rose in her bosom. He thought how often in the dreary time to come she would arise before him

like a picture, with the sunshine flickering about her bright hair, and the red rose at her breast.

She was very sweet to him that evening, tender and gentle and clinging, as she might have been with a fondly loved brother who was leaving her for ever. The farmer asked him about his plans, and gave his approval of them heartily. It was well for a sturdy fellow with a bit of money to push his way in a new country, where he might make fifty per cent. upon his capital, instead of dawdling on in England, where it was quite as much as a man could do to make both ends meet at the close of a year's hard work.

'My little Susy is going to be married to young Bob Ashley,' Mr. Lorton said by-and-by. 'He asked her last Tuesday was a week; but they've been courting in a kind of way this last twelvemonth. I couldn't well say no, for Bob's father and I have been friends for many a year, and the young man's a decent chap enough. He's going to rent that little dairy farm of Sir Marmaduke Halliday's on the other side of Hillborough Road. Old Ashley has promised to stock it for him, and he hopes to do

well. It isn't much of a match for my girl, you know, John; but the young people have made up their minds, so it's no use setting my face against it.'

They had been sitting at the tea-table nearly half an hour, when the sunny window was suddenly darkened by the apparition of Mr. Stephen Price looking in upon them in an easy familiar manner, with his folded arms upon the sill.

'Good evening, uncle Lorton,' he said. 'Good evening, Susy. How do, Granger? I didn't know there was going to be a tea-party, or I shouldn't have come.'

'It isn't a tea-party,' answered Susan; 'it is only John Granger, who has come to bid us good-bye, and we are very, very sorry he is going away.'

'Oh, we are, are we?' said the lawyer's clerk, with a sneer; 'what would Bob Ashley say to that, I wonder?'

'Come in, Steph, and don't be a fool,' growled the old man.

Mr. Price came in, and took his seat at the tea-table. He was flashily dressed, wore his hair long,

and had a good deal of whisker, which he was perpetually caressing with a hand of doubtful cleanliness, whereon the inky evidence of his day's work was unpleasantly obvious.

He did not care much for such womanish refreshment as tea, which he denounced in a sweeping manner as 'cat-lap;' but he took a cup from his cousin nevertheless, and joined freely in the conversation while he drank it.

He asked John Granger a good many questions about his plans—whether he meant to buy land, and when, and where, and a great deal more in the same way—to all of which John replied as shortly as was consistent with the coldest civility.

'You take all your capital with you, of course?' asked Stephen Price.

'No; I take none of my capital with me.'

'Why, hang it all, man, you must take some money!'

'I take the money I received for my furniture and stock.'

'Ah, to be sure; you came to the office yesterday afternoon to receive it? Over six hundred pounds,

wasn't it? I drew up the agreement between you and the new man; so I ought to know.'

'It was over six hundred pounds.'

'And you take that with you? Quite enough to start with, of course. And the rest of your money is as safe as houses in old Lawler's bank. No fear of any smash there. I wish I was going with you, Granger. I'm heartily sick of Hillborough. I shall cut old Vollair's office before very long, come what may. I can't stand it much longer. I've got a friend on the look-out for a berth for me up in London, and directly I hear of anything I shall turn my back upon this dismal old hole.'

'You'll have to pay your debts before you do that, I should think, Steph,' his uncle remarked, bluntly.

Stephen Price shrugged his shoulders, and pushed his teacup away with a listless air. He got up presently and lounged out of the house, after a brief good evening to all. He made no attempt to take leave of John Granger, and seemed in his careless way to have forgotten that he was parting with him for the last time. No one tried to detain him. They seemed to breathe more freely when he was gone.

John and Susan wandered out into the garden after tea, while the farmer smoked his pipe by the open window. The sun was low by this time, and the western sky flooded with rosy light. The garden was all abloom with roses and honeysuckle. John Granger fancied he should never look upon such flowers or such a garden again.

They walked up and down the narrow path once or twice almost in silence, and then Susan began to tell him how much she regretted his departure.

'I don't know how it is, John,' she said, 'but I feel to-night as if I would give all the world to keep you here. I cannot tell you how sorry I am you are going. Oh, John, I wish with all my heart I could have been what you asked me to be. I wish I could have put aside all thoughts of Robert.'

'Could you have done that, Susan?' he cried, with sudden energy.

His fate trembled upon a breath in that moment. A word from Susan, and he would have stayed; a word from her, and he would never have taken the path across the common and through the wood to Hillborough on that fair summer evening. He

was her valued friend of many years; dearer to her than she had known until that moment. It seemed to her all at once that she had thrown away the gold, and had chosen—not dross, but something less precious than that unalloyed gold.

It was too late now for any change.

'I have promised Robert to be his wife,' she said; 'but oh, John, I wish you were not going away.'

'My dear love, I could not trust myself to stay here; I love you too much for that. But I will come back when I am a sober elderly man, and ask for a corner beside your hearth.'

'Promise me that. And you will write to me from America, won't you, John? I shall be so anxious, and father too, to know that you are safe and well.'

'Yes, my dear, I will write.'

'What is the name of the steamer you are to go in?'

'The *Washington*, bound for New York.'

'I shall not forget that—the *Washington*.'

John Granger looked at his watch. The sun had

gone down, and there was a long line of crimson yonder in the west above the edge of the brown furze-grown common. Beyond it, the wood dipped down, and the tops of the trees made a black line against that red light. Above, the sky was of one pale tender green, with stars faintly shining here and there.

'What a lovely night!' said Susan.

John Granger sighed as he looked at that peaceful landscape.

'I did not know how much I loved this place and all belonging to it,' he said. 'Good night, Susy; good night, and good-bye.'

'Won't you kiss me the last time, John?' she said, shyly.

She scarcely knew what she had asked. He took her in his arms, strained her to his breast, and pressed one passionate, despairing kiss upon her brow. It was the first and last in his life.

'Time's up, Susy,' he said, gently releasing her.

He went to the window, shook hands with the farmer, and took leave of him in that quiet, undemonstrative way which means a good deal with a man of

John Granger's mould. A minute more, and he was gone.

Susan stood at the garden-gate, watching the tall dark figure crossing the common. Twice he turned and waved his hand to her,—the last time upon the edge of the common, before he took the path down to the wood. After this night the still twilight hour seldom came without bringing the thought of him to Susan Lorton.

It seemed to grow dark all at once when he was gone, and the house had a dreary look to Susan when she went indoors. What was it that made her shiver as she crossed the threshold? Something—some nameless, shapeless fancy shook her with a sudden fear. Her father had strolled out to the garden through the wide open back door. The house seemed quite empty, and the faint sound of the summer wind sighing in the parlour chimney was like the lamentation of a human creature in pain.

CHAPTER III.

THE summer passed, and in the late autumn came Susan's wedding day. She was very fond of her good-looking generous-hearted young suitor, and yet even on the eve of her marriage her heart had turned a little regretfully towards absent John Granger. She was not a coquette, to glory in the mischief her beauty had done. It seemed to her a terrible thing that a good man should have been driven from his home for love of her.

She had thought of him a great deal since that summer night upon which he had looked back at her on the verge of Hawley Wood—all the more because no letter had come from him yet, and she was beginning to be a little anxious about his safety. She thought of him still more, by and by, as the winter months passed without bringing the promised letter. Her husband made light of her fears, telling her that

John Granger would find plenty to do in a new country, without wasting his time in scribbling letters to old friends. But this did not convince Susan.

'He promised to write, Robert,' she said; 'and John Granger is not the man to break his promise.'

Susan was very happy in her new home, and Robert Ashley declared he had the handiest, brightest, and most industrious wife in all Woodlandshire, to say nothing of her being the prettiest. She had been used to keeping her father's house since her early girlhood, and her matronly duties came very easy to her. The snug little farmhouse, with its neat furniture and fresh dimity draperies, was the prettiest thing possible in the way of rustic interiors; the Dutch-tiled dairy was like a temple dedicated to some pastoral divinity, and Susan took a natural womanly pride in this bright home. She had come from as good a house; but then this was quite her own, and young Robert Ashley was a more romantic figure in the foreground of the picture than her good humdrum old father.

Stephen Price did not stay at Hillborough long

enough to see his cousin's wedding. He left Mr. Vollair's employment about three weeks after John Granger's departure, and left without giving his employer any notice of his intention.

He went away from Hillborough as deeply in debt as it was practicable for a young man in his position to be, and the tradesmen to whom he owed money were loud in their complaints about him.

He was known to have gone to London, and there were some attempts made to discover his whereabouts. But in that mighty metropolis it was no easy thing to find an obscure lawyer's clerk, and nothing resulted from the endeavours of his angry creditors, except the mortification of defeat, which made them still more angry. No one, except those to whom he owed money, cared what had become of him. He had been considered pleasant company in a tavern parlour, and his manners and dress had been copied by some aspiring clerks and apprentices in Hillborough; but he had never been known to do any one a kindness, and his disappearance left no empty place in any heart.

The new year came, and still there was no letter from John Granger. But early in January Robert

Ashley came home from Hillborough market one afternoon, and told his wife she needn't worry herself about her old friend any longer.

'John Granger's safe enough, my lass,' he said. 'I was talking to Simmons, the cashier at Lawler's bank, this morning, and he told me that Granger wrote to them for a thousand pounds last November from New York, and he has written for five hundred more since. He is buying land somewhere—I forget the name of the place—and he's well and hearty, Simmons tells me.'

Susan clapped her hands joyfully.

'Oh, Robert, how glad I am!' she cried. 'It isn't kind of John to have forgotten his promise; but I don't care about that as long as he's safe.'

'I don't know why you should ever take it into your head that there was anything amiss with him,' said Robert Ashley, who did not regard John Granger's exile from a sentimental point of view.

'Well, I'm afraid I'm rather fanciful, Bob; but I could never explain to you what a strange feeling came over me the night John Granger went away

from Hillborough. It was after I had said good-bye to him, and had gone back into the house, where all was dark and quiet. I sat in the parlour thinking of him, and it seemed as if a voice was saying in my ear that neither I, nor any one that cared for him, would ever see John Granger again. There wasn't any such voice, of course, you know, Robert, but it seemed like that in my mind; and whenever I've thought of poor John Granger since that time, it has seemed to me like thinking of the dead. Often and often I've said to myself, "Why, Susan, you foolish thing, you ought to know that he's safe enough out in America. Ill news travels fast; and if there'd been anything wrong, we should have heard of it somehow." But, reason with myself as I would, I have never been able to feel comfortable about him; and thank God for your good news, Robert, and thank you for bringing it to me.'

She raised herself on tiptoe to kiss her husband, who looked down at her in a fond, protecting way from the height of his own wisdom.

'Why, Susy, what a timid, nervous little puss you are!' he said. 'I should have been getting

jealous of John Granger by this time if I'd known you thought so much of him.'

The winter days lengthened, and melted into early spring. It was bright March weather, and Susan had an hour of daylight after tea for her needlework, while Robert attended to his evening duties out of doors. They had fires still, though the days were very mild; and Susan used to sit at the open window, with a jug of primroses on the wide wooden ledge before her, executing some dainty little repairs upon her husband's shirts.

One evening Robert Ashley was out later than usual, and when it had grown too dark for her to work any longer, Susan sat with her hands lying idle in her lap thinking—thinking of her wedded life, and the years that had gone before it—years that she could never recall without the image of John Granger, who had been in a manner mixed up with all her girlish days. It had been very unkind of him not to write. It seemed as if his love for her could not have been very much after all, or he would have been pleased to comply with her request. She could not quite forgive him for

his neglect, glad as she was to know that he was safe.

The room was rather a large one; an old-fashioned room, with a low ceiling crossed by heavy beams; half parlour, half kitchen, with a wide open fireplace at one end, on which the logs had burnt to a dullish red just now, only brightening up with a faint flash of light now and then. The old chintz-covered arm-chair, in which Robert Ashley was wont to smoke his evening pipe, stood by the hearth ready for him.

Susan had been sitting with her face towards the open window, looking absently out at the garden, where daffodils and early primroses glimmered through the dusk. It was only the striking of the eight-day clock in the corner that roused her from her reverie. She stooped to pick up her work, which had fallen to the ground. She was standing folding this in a leisurely way, when she looked towards the fireplace, and gave a little start at seeing that her husband's arm-chair was no longer empty.

'Why, Robert,' she cried, 'how quietly you

must have come into the place! I never heard you.'

There was no answer, and her voice sounded strange to her in the empty room.

'Robert!' she repeated, a little louder; but the figure in the chair neither answered nor stirred.

Then a sudden fright seized her, and she knew that it was not her husband. The room was almost dark; it was quite impossible that she could see the face of that dark figure seated in the arm-chair, with the shoulders bent a little over the fire. Yet she knew, as well as ever she had known anything in her life, that it was not Robert Ashley.

She went slowly towards the fireplace, and stood within a few paces of that strange figure. A little flash of light shot up from the smouldering logs, and shone for an instant on the face.

It was John Granger!

Susan Ashley tried to speak to him; but the words would not come. And yet it was hardly so appalling a thing to see him there that she need have felt what she did. England is not so far from

America that a man may not cross the sea and drop in upon his friends unexpectedly.

The logs fell together with a crashing noise, and broke into a ruddy flame, lighting up the whole room. The chair was empty.

Susan uttered a loud cry, and almost at the same moment Robert Ashley came in at the door.

'Why, Susy!' he exclaimed, 'what's amiss, lass?'

She ran to him, and took shelter in his arms, sobbing hysterically, and then, calming herself with an effort, told him how she had seen John Granger's ghost.

Robert laughed her to scorn.

"Why, my pet, what fancies will you be having next? Granger is safe enough over in Yankee land. It was some shadow that took the shape of your old friend, to your fancy. It's easy enough to fancy such a thing when your mind's full of any one.'

'There's no use in saying that, Robert,' Susan answered, resolutely. 'It was no fancy. John Granger is dead, and I have seen his ghost.'

'He wasn't dead on the 10th of last December,

anyhow. They had a letter from him at Lawler's bank, dated that day. Simmons told me so.'

Susan shook her head mournfully.

'I've a feeling that he never got to America alive, Robert,' she said. 'I can't explain how it is, but I've a feeling that it was so.'

'Dead men don't write letters, Susy, or send for their money out of the bank.'

'Some one else might write the letters.'

'Nonsense, lass! they know John Granger's handwriting and signature well enough at the bank, depend upon it. It would be no easy matter to deceive them. But I'll look in upon Simmons to-morrow. He and I are uncommonly friendly, you know, and there's nothing he wouldn't do to oblige me, in a reasonable way. I'll ask him if there have been any more letters from Granger, and get him to give me the address.'

Susan did not say much more about that awful figure in the arm-chair. It was no use trying to convince her husband that the thing which she had seen was anything more than a creation of her own brain. She was very quiet all the rest of the

evening, though she tried her uttermost to appear as if nothing had happened.

Robert Ashley saw Mr. Simmons the cashier next day, and came back to his wife elated by the result of his inquiries. John Granger had written for another five hundred pounds by the very last post from America, and reported himself well and thriving. He was still in New York, and Mr. Simmons had given Robert Ashley his address in that city.

Susan wrote to her old friend that very afternoon, telling him what she had seen, and begging him to write and set her mind at ease. After all, it was very consoling to hear what she had heard from her husband, and she tried to convince herself that the thing she had seen was only a trick of her imagination.

Another month went by, and again in the twilight the same figure appeared to her. It was standing this time, with one arm leaning on the high mantelpiece; standing facing her as she came back to the room, after having quitted it for a few minutes for some slight household duty.

There was a better fire and more light in the room than there had been before. The logs were burning with a steady blaze that lit up the well-known figure and unforgotten face. John Granger was looking at her with an expression that seemed half reproachful, half beseeching. He was very pale, much paler than she had ever seen him in life; and as he looked, she standing just within the threshold of the door, she saw him lift his hand slowly and point to his forehead. The firelight showed her a dark red stain upon the left temple, like the mark of a contused wound.

She covered her face with her hands, shuddering and uttering a little cry of terror, and then dropped half fainting upon a chair. When she uncovered her face the room was empty, the firelight shining cheerily upon the walls, no trace of that ghostly visitant. Again when her husband came in she told him of what she had seen, and of that mark upon the temple which she had seen for the first time that night. He heard her very gravely. This repetition of the business made it serious. If it were, as Robert Ashley fully believed it was, a delusion of his wife's,

it was a dangerous delusion, and he knew not how to charm it away from her mind. She had conjured up a new fancy now, this notion of a blood-stained temple; the ghastly evidence of some foul play that had been done to John Granger.

And the man was alive and well in America all the time; but how convince a woman of that fact when she preferred to trust her own sick fancies?

This time Susan Ashley brooded over the thoughts of the thing she had seen, firmly believing that she had looked upon the shadow of the dead, and that there was some purpose to be fulfilled by that awful vision. In the day, however busy she might be with her daily work, the thought of this was almost always in her mind; in the dead silence of the night' when her husband was sleeping by her side, she would often lie awake for hours thinking of John Granger.

No answer had come to her letter, though there had been more than time for her to receive one.

'Robert,' she said to her husband one day, 'I do not believe that John Granger ever went to America.'

'Oh, Susy, Susy, I wish you could get John

Granger out of your head. Who is it that writes for his money, if it isn't he?'

'Anybody might know of the money—people know everything about their neighbours' affairs in Hillborough—and anybody that knew John Granger's hand might be able to forge a letter. I don't believe he ever went to America, Robert. I believe some accident—some fatal accident—happened to him on the night he was to leave Hillborough.'

'Why, Susy, what should happen to him, and we not hear of it?'

'He might have been waylaid and murdered. He had a good deal of money about him, I know, that night; he was to sail from London by the *Washington*, and his luggage was all sent to an inn near the Docks. I wish you'd write to the people, Robert, and ask if he arrived there at the time he was expected; and I wish you'd find out at the station whether any one saw him go away by the train that night.'

'It's easy enough to do as much as that to please you, Susy. But I wish you wouldn't dwell upon

these fancies about Granger; it's all nonsense, as you'll find out sooner or later.'

He wrote the letter which his wife wanted written, asking the landlord of the Victoria Hotel, London Docks, whether a certain Mr. John Granger, whose travelling chests had been forwarded from Hillborough, had arrived at his house on the 24th of July last, and when and how he had quitted it. He also took the trouble to go to the Hillborough Station, in order to question the station-master and his subordinates about John Granger's departure.

Neither the station-master nor the porters were able to give Robert Ashley any satisfactory information on this point. One or two of the men were not quite clear that they knew John Granger by sight; another knew him very well indeed, but could not swear to having seen him that night. The station-master was quite clear that he had *not* seen him.

'I'm generally pretty busy with the mail-bags at that time,' he said, 'and a passenger might very well escape my notice. But it would only have been civil in Granger to bid me good-bye; I've known him ever since he was a lad.'

This was not a satisfactory account to carry back to Susan; nor was the letter that came from London in a day or two much more satisfactory. The landlord of the Victoria Hotel begged to inform Mr. Ashley that the owner of the trunks from Hillborough had not arrived at his house until the middle of August. He was not quite sure about the date; but he knew the luggage had been lying in his place for something over three weeks, and he was thinking of advertising it, when the owner appeared.

Three weeks! and John Granger had left Susan Lorton that July night, intending to go straight to London. Where could he have been? What could he have been doing in the interval?

Robert Ashley tried to make light of the matter. Granger might have changed his mind at the last moment—at the railway station, perhaps—and might have gone off to visit friends in some other part of the country. But Susan told her husband that John Granger had no friends except at Hillborough, and that he was not given to changing his mind upon any occasion. She had now a settled conviction that some untimely fate had befallen her old friend, and that the letters from America were forgeries.

Ashley told his friend Simmons the story of the ghost rather reluctantly, but it was necessary to tell it in explaining how the letter to the London hotel-keeper came to be written. Of course Mr. Simmons was quite ready to agree with him that the ghostly part of the business was no more than a delusion of Susan's; but he was a good deal puzzled, not to say disturbed, by the hotel-keeper's letter. He had talked over John Granger's plans with him on that last day, and he remembered that John had been perfectly decided in his intention of going straight to London. The three weeks' interval between his departure from Hillborough and his arrival in that city was a mystery not easily to be explained.

Mr. Simmons referred to the letters from New York, and compared the signatures of them with previous signatures of John Granger's. If they were forgeries, they were very clever forgeries; but Granger's was a plain commercial hand by no means difficult to imitate. There was one thing noticeable in the signatures to the American letters—they were all exactly alike, line for line and curve for curve. This rather discomposed Mr. Simmons; for it is a noto-

rious fact that a man rarely signs his name twice in exactly the same manner. There is almost always some difference.

'I'm going up to London in a month,' said the cashier; 'I'll call at the Victoria Hotel when I'm there, and make a few inquiries about John Granger. We can make some excuse for keeping back the money in the mean time, if there should be any more written for.'

Before the month was out, John Granger's ghost appeared for the third time to Susan Ashley. She had been to Hillborough alone to make some little purchases in the way of linen-drapery, and came home through Hawley Wood in the tender May twilight. She was thinking of her old friend as she walked along the shadowy winding footpath. It was just such a still, peaceful evening as that upon which he had stood on the edge of the common looking back at her, and waving his hand, upon that last well-remembered night.

He was so much in her thoughts, and the conviction that he had come from among the dead to visit her was so rooted in her mind, that she was scarcely

surprised when she looked up presently, and saw a tall familiar figure moving slowly among the trees a little way before her. There seemed to be an awful stillness in the wood all at once, but there was nothing awful in that well-known figure.

She tried to overtake it; but it kept always in advance of her, and at a sudden turn in the path she lost it altogether. The trees grew thicker, and there was a solemn darkness at the spot where the path took this sharp turn, and on one side of the narrow footpath there was a steep declivity and a great hollow, made by a disused gravel-pit.

She went home quietly enough, with a subdued sadness upon her, and told her husband what had happened to her. Nor did she rest until there had been a search made in Hawley Wood for the body of John Granger.

They searched, and found him lying at the bottom of the gravel-pit, half-buried in loose sand and gravel, and quite hidden by a mass of furze and bramble that grew over the spot. There was an inquest, of course. The tailor who had made the clothes found upon the body identified them, and

swore to them as those he had made for John Granger. The pockets were all empty. There could be little doubt that John Granger had been waylaid and murdered for the sake of the money he carried upon him that night. His skull had been shattered by a blow from a jagged stick on the left temple. The stick was found lying at the bottom of the pit a little way from the body, with human hair and stains of blood upon it.

John Granger had never left Hillborough; and the person who had contrived to procure so much of his money, by sending the deposit receipts and forged letters from America, was, in all probability, his murderer. There was a large reward offered for the discovery of the guilty party; the police were hard at work; and the inquest was adjourned several times, in the hope that new facts might be elicited.

Susan Ashley and her father were examined closely as to the events of that fatal evening of July the 24th. Susan told everything: her cousin Stephen Price dropping in while they were at tea, the questions and answers about the money John

Granger carried upon him—to the most minute particular.

'Then Price knew of the money Granger had about him?' suggested the coroner.

'He did, sir.'

'And did he know that he had money on deposit in Hillborough Bank?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Did Price leave your father's house after Granger, or before him?'

'Before him, sir: nearly an hour before him.'

The inquest was adjourned; and, within a week of this examination, Matthew Lorton received an application from the police, asking for a photograph of his nephew Stephen Price, if he happened to possess such a thing.

He did possess one, and sent it to London by return of post.

The landlord of the Victoria Hotel identified this portrait as that of the person who represented himself to be John Granger, and who carried away John Granger's luggage.

After this the work was easy. Little links in

the chain were picked up one by one. A labouring man turned up who had seen Stephen Price sitting on a stile hard by Hawley Wood, hacking at a thick jagged-looking stake with his clasp-knife, on the night of the 24th of July. The woman at whose house Price lodged gave evidence that he broke an appointment to play billiards with a friend of his on that night; the friend had called at his lodgings for him twice, and had been angry about the breaking of the appointment; and Stephen Price came in about half-past ten o'clock, looking very white and strange. The lad who was his fellow-clerk was ready to swear to his having been disturbed and strange in his manner during the two or three weeks before he left Hillborough; but the boy had thought very little of this, he said, knowing how deeply Stephen was in debt.

The final examination resulted in a verdict of wilful murder; and a police-officer started for New York by the next steamer, carrying a warrant for the apprehension of Stephen Price.

He was not found very easily, but was ultimately apprehended, with some of John Granger's property still in his possession. He was brought home, tried,

found guilty, and hung, much to the satisfaction of Hillborough. Shortly afterwards, Mr. Vollair produced a will, which John Granger had executed a few days before his intended departure, bequeathing all he possessed to Susan Lorton—the interest for her sole use and benefit, the principal to revert to her eldest son after her death, the son to take the name of Granger. The bank had to make good the money drawn from them by Stephen Price. The boy came in due course, and was christened after the dead man, above whose remains a fair white monument has been erected in the rustic churchyard near Hawley Wood, at the expense of Robert and Susan Ashley; a handsomer tomb than is usually given to a man of John Granger's class, but it was the only thing Susan could do to show how much she had valued him who had loved her so dearly.

She often sits beside that quiet resting-place in the spring twilight, with her children busy making daisy-chains at her knee; but she has never seen John Granger's ghost since that evening in the wood, and she knows that she will never see it again.

PRINCE RAMJI ROWDEDOW.

I CANNOT say that Slimeford-on-the-Slushy is a likely town in which to make a great theatrical benefit. I cannot say that Slimeford is a good town for theatricals in any way or shape, or that the inhabitants of Slimeford patronize either the Thespian art, or any other art, or any science, amusement, or pursuit of any kind whatsoever, with much enthusiasm. I cannot say that Slimeford is a fine town or a pretty town; unless, indeed, your idea of architectural beauty is confined to one interminable street of undeviatingly ugly houses, intersected by an infinite number of smaller streets, if possible more ugly than the chief thoroughfare, and surrounded on all sides by a rising neighbourhood; a rising neighbourhood dotted with hideous manufactories, which start up, like grimy

demons, with outstretched wings of brick and mortar, to shut out the country. And, O reader, what on the surface of God's earth, as man has marred it, is more frightful than a rising neighbourhood? A row of newly-finished houses, a row of unfinished ditto, an exhausted brickfield, and a patch of waste land—ring the changes on these as you will, and get beauty out of them if you can; and only so much beauty can you get out of a rising neighbourhood.

I cannot say that the Slushy is a beautiful river, or that the muddy banks thereof are pleasant walking, or that any mortal, not an inhabitant of Slimeford, ever expressed admiration for its dirty waters, on which dismal black barges lie at anchor here and there, and into which various dye-works and other factories discharge their viscid and rainbow-hued liquids.

One peculiarity of Slimeford is that its working classes are always on strike at the very period when a dramatic company enters the town. You are greeted with the intelligence that the weavers are out, and not likely to be in for a couple of months; and that the dyers are resolved to have an additional

three halfpence an hour, or fold their arms and perish. You should have come last year; you would have done wonders last year. But unfortunately you are not in the habit of going to places last year.

Now I had the honour to be, for three seasons, first low comedian of the Theatre Royal, Slimeford; and for the first two seasons I had the honour to take benefits, whereat my labours to please were rewarded by a limited circle of from three to seven in the boxes, a dreary sprinkling in the pit, and a row-and-a-half or so in the gallery. Now, if you deduct £7 for the expenses of the house, as computed by the manager, thirty shillings for printing, an odd pound or so for properties—not a little money spent in the pursuit of that diplomatic process called benefit-making—you won't get much of a surplus out of £4 10s., two-thirds of which surplus, if there were one, would go to the lessee. Therefore my benefits, during the first two seasons, had the disappointing result of plunging me deeply and hopelessly into debt.

The third season was drawing to a close, and Slimeford was, if possible, in a state of greater stagnation than usual. The weavers had made a most

obstinate strike of it, and the only thing stirring was a penny subscription to keep the contumacious dyers from starvation. I looked around as I stood pensively on the banks of the Slushy, and meditated on my chances of filling the crazy old Theatre Royal on Wednesday, the 19th instant, which night had been set apart for the benefit of me, Mr. John Miffs. Now I had, in the course of my professional career, beheld one marvel in theatrical statistics—or shall I say playgoing human nature?—*i.e.* that however poor the inhabitants of a town, however high the price of the quartern loaf, however great the demand for blue ruin, with its attendant ills of starvation and crime; however you may have been assured again and again that the people cannot come to the theatre, because they have actually not the money to pay for admission, let Mr. Sims Reeves or Mr. Sothern, Mr. Charles Mathews, Mr. Irving, or Mr. Buckstone—let, I say, any of these aforesaid artists, or many others I could mention, put out an announcement, in capitals three feet high, of their intention to appear at the Theatre Royal Anywhere, and, lo! that theatre is immediately filled. Now, I don't know whether

it was an inspiration or not, but at the very moment when Venus rose pale in an opal evening sky, her beautiful face feebly mirrored in the grimy waters of the Slushy, I suddenly exclaimed, 'A star!' Yes, I would have a star to play for my benefit, and thus fill the theatre.

But then, what star? I had not the pleasure of Mr. Buckstone's acquaintance, and if I had, was it likely that distinguished comedian would withdraw himself from the part in which he was at that time delighting his friends in the Haymarket, for my pleasure and profit? I didn't know Mr. Sothern, but I knew enough of that gentleman to think it scarcely probable he would choose the Theatre Royal, Slimeford, wherein to commence his great tour of the provinces. I didn't know the talking fish; I hadn't so much as a pig-faced lady amongst my acquaintances. What star? Ah, Venus, shining with serene radiance above the smoke-cloud that envelopes Slimeford, could you only help me with a suggestion! If the Shah of Persia had been in England, he might have obliged me by taking a private box and exhibiting himself in state apparel to Slimeford.

And if the Shah of Persia, why not an Indian prince? Yes, above all things an Indian prince! A most brilliant idea! I registered a vow, as I stood on that bridge in the twilight. I would have an Indian prince to play for my benefit.

I am not of a lymphatic temperament. I believe, indeed, that I come rather under the head of the sanguine nervous, but I leave that question in physiology to the decision of the intelligent reader, when I inform him that the next morning every patch of paling, every blank wall, every house in Chancery, every stray shutter of every shop to let, was pasted with a staring red-and-blue announcement of the first and only appearance of His Royal Highness Prince Ramji Rowdedow, from the kingdom of Goojeebadanistan, that vast territory between the Ganges and the Himalayas, for the benefit of Mr. John Miffs; while in the principal windows of the town were exhibited lithographed full-length portraits of an imposing individual of the mulatto race, in a gorgeous costume of the character usually worn by that interesting Moor who is familiar to all students of the Shakespearian drama.

Depressed as was the aspect of trade in Slimeford, my notion took. There was from the first issuing of the bills considerable excitement in the town on the subject of the Indian prince. The very printer who set up the bills offered to do the job at a lower rate, on condition of being one of the favoured few who were to form a little deputation to meet the prince at the railway station. Of course there were many inquiries as to why the royal personage had left his native land; and his popularity rose tremendously, especially among the fairer portion of the community, when I explained that he had been deposed from the royal musnud by a benighted people, on account of the advancement and enlightenment of his opinions, especially with reference to polygamy and widow-burning. He was announced to appear in the character of Obi; and the fact of a native prince from the distant land of Bramah and Juggernaut coming down to Slimeford to enact that hero of romance, did not appear to the intelligent townsmen at all a strange occurrence. A foreign prince, a talking fish, or Mr. Charles Mathews—what are any such institutions intended for, but to

minister to the amusement, gratify the admiring gaze, and stimulate the organ of wonder of the inhabitants of Slimeford? For these good people, I think, had a very limited belief in the actual existence of any world beyond the rising neighbourhood which bounded their own town.

Wednesday the 19th instant arrived, and the whole theatre-going populace was on the *qui vive;* while the question as to how and when his highness from the principality of Goojeebadanistan would enter the town was freely discussed. Be it understood, these good people were quite assured that the prince was coming all the way from the shores of the Ganges for their amusement. Had they thought for a moment that his exiled highness might be a lodger in Marylebone, or a ratepayer of St. Pancras, the whole zest of the thing would have been gone.

Even at the theatre, amongst my companion votaries of Thespis, there was not a little curiosity; and I was compelled, with that beautiful candour which distinguishes me, to admit to one or two of my intimates that my friend Rowdedow was not in sober earnest actually the scion of a royal race, being in point of

fact the private secretary of a rich indigo planter, who had accompanied his employer to England, and who had been dismissed from that service on account of a suspected leaning towards the worship of the goddess Kali, the tutelary divinity of the Thugs, or stranglers, sometimes called Noosers. The damask cheek of my friend Percy Deloraine, *jeune premier*, blanched somewhat at this revelation; and he expressed a strong aversion from acting in the same piece with his highness; but on my assuring him that, if treated with a cold and distant respect, Ramji was the best fellow breathing, he consented to oblige me.

The prince, I informed my manager and brother actors, would not arrive until an hour or two before the commencement of the performance, as important business—no less, in fact, than an interview with the chief of the English Government concerning his restoration to that vast territory which extends from the western arm of the Ganges to the distant source of the Oxus, as I added, somewhat recklessly, with a view to local colouring—would detain him in London. I therefore read his part at rehearsal, arranged his entrances and exits, and went through all his stage

business. I also planned the construction and adornment of a temporary dressing-room, to be erected by the property-man for my royal friend's convenience, and made all arrangements necessary for the honourable reception of the royal personage. As I left the theatre, after that morning's rehearsal, a crowd of dirty little boys and one respectable maid-servant with a baby and a perambulator, did me the honour to accompany me in a little impromptu procession to my residence. Whether they imagined I might keep the prince in my pocket, or in a sealed bottle, like the genie in the *Arabian Nights*, I know not; but they evidently thought their best chance of beholding the Oriental potentate lay in not losing sight of me. Now, this persistent attention on the part of the public, honourable as it was to all concerned, was also somewhat embarrassing to me, as I had a good deal of work to accomplish (of a kind that must remain a secret to the British public) before His Royal Highness Ramji Rowdedow could possibly blaze, like the sun in his Oriental splendour, before the dazzled eyes of Slimeford. For this, I had need of a friend—a friend on whom I could rely—in

whose hand I could lay my own, and say, 'Here is the soul incapable of treachery; here is the tongue never known to betray;' or in the more vigorous language of Seven Dials, 'This 'ere's the cove wot never rounded on his pal.'

Such a friend I could boast in the person of Mr. Richard Wittington, eccentric comedian; and to him I went. What passed between us I do not intend to reveal, but our parting agreement was to the following effect: Wittington pledged himself to superintend the reception of his highness. For this purpose he was to hire the largest and most splendid open vehicle to be procured from the King's Arms livery-yard, and a pair of white horses; with which equipage he was to proceed, at a quarter-past five o'clock, to the railway station. He was also to hire an inferior vehicle, in which a portion of the band belonging to the theatre—namely, clarionet, cornet, and big drum—should be seated, to give effect to the procession with such soul-stirring melodies as 'See, the conquering Hero,' 'Rule, Britannia,' the March from 'Bluebeard,' &c. This my friend Wittington was to do unaided, while

I departed to a distant village, some ten miles up the line, to arrange a small matter of business which it was impossible for me to postpone.

The hour came, the procession started in the following order from the King's Arms:—fly-and-pair, yellow body, pink-striped chintz lining, chocolate wheels, Mr. Richard Wittington seated *solus* in the vehicle, looking, strange to say, rather depressed than elated at the prospect of receiving his serene highness; nextly, the second-best fly, green body, red wheels, and leopard-skin chintz lining, a showy, impressive equipage, in which were seated the clarionet, cornet, flute, and big drum attached to the theatre, the big drum nearly filling the interior of the vehicle, and somewhat obscuring the distinguished musicians seated therein. This imposing procession of two carriages was followed by an immense crowd, composed of half the population of Slimeford. Of course the worthy citizens, being out of work, had nothing better to do than to pay their respects to the royal foreigner, and to show him, in the deliberate and piercing stare of the well-bred Englishman, the distinguishing mark of British hospitality.

Arrived at the station, which, with that regard to public convenience which generally characterizes the station of a provincial town, was about a mile from the high street, Mr. Wittington alone descended from his vehicle, and entered the gates of the building. He expressed a request to his friends and the public that they would not accompany him any farther, as their appearance in too abrupt a manner might disconcert the modest disposition of the great Ramji. This mild request, however, did not prevent Mr. Bulkins of the King's Arms, renowned for possessing great sporting acumen, and being always able to name the outsider that will not win the Derby or the Leger; Mrs. Potash the washerwoman; her daughter, Miss Potash (in her best bonnet of scarlet velvet and pearl beads, a cheerful and summery headgear); Miss Hooxanise, the dressmaker's apprentice; three nursemaids, sixteen babies, and several other enterprizing individuals, from penetrating to the very door of the second-class carriage, from which, with the unaffected humility that distinguishes those who are born in the purple, descended the illustrious Rowdedow.

Now, most of the inhabitants of Slimeford were well acquainted with the private life and domestic afflictions of Othello the noble Moor; and it occurred to all present that the prince bore a very strong resemblance to that individual as he would appear after exchanging his costly robes for a badly-fitting dress-coat from the emporium of Messrs. Moses and Sons. The noble physiognomy of the prince, it is marvellous to add, recalled to several among the playgoing population of Slimeford a face they had seen somewhere before, though the recollection was so vague as to make very little impression on those not over impressionable citizens. His complexion of a brownish black, was relieved by a crimson glow which illumined his cheeks and threw out the whites of his eyes with Oriental brilliancy. His long sleek hair, of rather a bluish black (in the sun it looked a thought rusty), was worn with the ends rolled under, after the manner of gentlemen of the equestrian profession. He wore a large beard and moustache, which imparted something of ferocity to his otherwise mild (sooth to say, somewhat timorous) expression of countenance. He wore a

magnificent fez cap, surmounted by a rich (though rather tarnished) gold tassel, and decorated with two or three large brooches (somewhat in the style of those which issue from the hands of the theatrical ornament-makers of Birmingham and Bow street), but which, no doubt, were the royal jewels of his imperial race; he also displayed on the ample breast of his dress-coat, which was a little white about the seams, various stars and crosses, besides that noble quadruped, the elephant, usually worn by his youthful highness, Hamlet the Dane. A superb crescent of Bristol paste, mounted on red cloth, shimmered in the dim obscurity of his waistcoat, and, seen from a distance, impressed the young mind with the idea of the diamonds of Golconda. His costume was completed by a pair of white duck trousers, patent-leather alberts, a bamboo cane, and an eye-glass, it being only becoming in royalty to be shortsighted. Nothing could exceed the *empressement* with which Mr. Wittington greeted the prince; he conversed with him apart in a foreign language, with characteristic gesticulation which was eminently gratifying to the lookers on; he preceded him

to the carriage, hat in hand, walking backwards, yes, actually walking backwards; a feat by which he cruelly punished the corns of the aggrieved populace who pressed close behind him. He also handed the exiled potentate into the pink-striped fly, and seated himself respectfully opposite, with his back to the horses. Then arose such a shout as, perhaps, since the days when the Reform Bill was passed, had never been heard in Slimeford: a shout of friendly welcome for the dark scion of a princely race, who sat bowing, smiling, and displaying a set of faultlessly white teeth to the admiring citizens. The band began, at a wink from my friend Wittington, to play 'See, the conquering Hero,' &c., which, as within no one's knowledge had the royal person ever been in battle, was of course highly appropriate. The two flies set off at a foot pace, the delighted populace on either side. They were charmed with the prince's bow; they were enraptured with the prince's smile; and 'Oh, look at his teeth!' yes, an audible murmur was heard amongst the throng, 'Look at his teeth!' At which, strange to say, the prince abruptly closed his mouth, and declined to exhibit his dental appen-

dages any more. The prince was evidently of a sensitive and retiring disposition. But, above all things, that which delighted the populace was the evident and demonstrative admiration evinced by his serene highness for the town and public buildings of Slimeford. He expressed, in vehement pantomime, his opinion that Slimeford in architectural beauty surpassed the proud towers of Delhi, the city of palaces; that the river Slushy in natural beauty might dispute the palm with his native Ganges, or the classic Indus dear to his childhood. When Mr. Wittington pointed out to him the church of St. Bulgrumblery, the chapel-of-ease, the fish market, the Baptist chapel, the post-office, and that æsthetic range of buildings known as the shambles, devoted to the sale of butcher's meat, the prince's shrugs, nods, and gesticulations evinced such admiration as the inhabitants of the town had never beheld before, even in a new candidate for the representation of the borough. The procession was, in short, intensely successful; and my new star, the illustrious Ramji, was honoured with such an ovation as I think neither Spanish dancers, talking fish, nor Mr.

Charles Mathews would ever have received in Slimeford.

But in spite of the cheers, of the heartiness of that welcome which the true-born Englishman always extends to every foreigner, there was something in the prince's manner, a shiver in the prince's manly form, a chatter about the prince's teeth, and, at the same time, a paleness of complexion, verging on the ghastly, visible in my friend Mr. Wittington, difficult to account for.

Can you, O sagacious reader, solve me this little enigma? Of course you can. I thought so. You know that it was because the great Ramji Rowdedow, illustrious heir to the principality of Goojeebadanistan, that vast territory between the Ganges and the Himalayas, was neither more nor less distinguished an individual than John Miffs, comedian—I, John Miffs, with the adornment of a burnt cork, a pennyworth of Armenian bole, a halfpennyworth of vermilion, a great deal of *crêpe* hair, and an Othello wig,—I, John Miffs, who had gone that morning ten miles down the line, and, at the house of a friendly innkeeper in the village of Bigglethorpe, had arrayed

myself in the costly attire of the Indian potentate. I leave it to the imagination, then, of the amiable reader whether I was not a little alarmed lest that intelligent public, which loves to be gulled, but hates to find out that it has been gulled, should by any means discover the cheat that I was putting upon it. Thus when, during my triumphal progress from the station to the theatre, the populace admired my teeth —I have a fine set of teeth, I confess—I shut my mouth, in mortal fear lest young Joe Mulkins, Mr. Forcep the dentist's assistant, who was hanging on to the door of my chariot, should see that double tooth near the front which he had stopped three days before, and which still glittered in all the first radiance of the gold filling, Who can describe the horror of that moment, when a gentle and refreshing shower descended from the afternoon sky, and I dreaded to behold my complexion trickling down in brown drops upon my shirt-front, and when my friend Dick's nervous attempts to shut up that mysterious vehicle, the fly, were greeted with the anger of a ferocious crowd?

'Oh, hang it! let us see un; we've come all the

way to see un; don't go for to shoot up t' coach!' cried that unappeasable populace.

But the heavens were kind to the descendant of a royal race, and I shone out again in that beauty whose only blemish was its liability to come off.

'Put out your hand,' whispered Wittington; 'it looks very natural.'

I placed that member, adorned with a property diamond ring, carelessly on the carriage door, and lo! the admiring crowd exclaimed as with one voice, 'Look at his 'and!' Indeed, one old man, a determined sightseer, who had never quitted the wheels of our vehicle, laid hold with reverence upon my dexter paw, perhaps to discover whether that portion of an Indian prince's anatomy was like the flesh and blood of every-day life.

The royal *cortège* reached the doors of the theatre, still followed by the delighted crowd. The prince alighted from the stately vehicle, and then gracefully ascended, on the tips of his patent leather alberts, the green baize-covered plank which the property man, enthusiastic in the cause of exiled greatness, had placed to form an impromptu bridge leading

from the kerbstone to the stage-door, so that his highness's gracious feet should not be defiled by the puddles of Slimeford. At the stage door the Oriental countenance of his serenity broke anew into a radiant smile, and he made a series of grateful bows to the crowd; which were responded to by three hearty cheers and ever so many little ones in. These culminated in a deafening shout as he disappeared within the building; while Mr. Richard Wittington closed the door firmly on the persevering populace, which immediately proceeded to the pit and gallery doors, there to await, armed with sterling coin of the realm, the commencement of the performance, and the first appearance on the boards of Slimeford of a prince of the blood royal.

Within the theatre, Rowdedow was greeted with bows and smiles from the ladies and gentlemen of the company, who had dressed early for their respective parts in the drama of "Obi," and assembled in the green-room for the sole purpose of staring at him. There was a little attempt at conversation. The prince was asked his opinion of England, English manners and customs, &c., but the shrugs of his

graceful shoulders, and elevations of his strongly defined eyebrows, with which he responded, evinced such an utter ignorance of the English language as rendered discourse impossible; indeed, when Mr. Spavins, a gentleman who had been in India, actually addressed his royal highness in Hindostanee, he still continued the shrug of non-comprehension, whereat that gentleman was cruelly laughed at by his compeers for having attempted a language he could not speak. 'That's *your* Hindostanee, is it? You see, his excellency doesn't understand a syllable.' As indeed his excellency did not.

The property man preceded Ramji with two composite candles to the before-mentioned temporary dressing-room, and a young man who ran errands for the company requested to know, both by talking at the highest pitch of his voice (strange that foreigners do not understand our language better when we shout it as through a ship's trumpet!) and by expressive pantomime, whether he could be of any assistance in the toilet of the star. His aid was declined; and the illustrious Ramji begged, still in pantomime, to be left alone.

About this time the manager asked with considerable surprise what had become of Miffs ? and the cry of 'Where's Miffs?' was echoed through the theatre. My friend Dick Wittington explained that as I did not play in my first piece, I had taken the opportunity of running down to some friends to sell some tickets ; 'or very likely,' continued my friend, 'he may be next door' (next door was a tavern much affected by the Thespian corps). Richard indeed ran into the bar and asked if anybody had seen Miffs. No, nobody had seen Miffs. Miffs was not to be found. He did not even make his appearance when, the last bar of the overture being played, the curtain rose to a delighted audience, and in due course the Royal Obi appeared upon the boards. The prince enacted the part entirely in pantomime, applauded to the echo, and great was the wonderment of Slimeford that a denizen of a distant land, the wanderer from another hemisphere, should be so well up in every little bit of Victoria business and claptrap, familiar to them from the performance of the great Hicks. The curtain fell, the theatre rang with loud cries of 'Rowdedow !' the prince appeared, his hand upon his breast, his head bent, his jaws

working vigorously, as if employed in chewing betel-nut, or repeating to himself inward pæans of thanks-giving. This done, he made a general bow to the company, and in spite of numerous requests that he would take wine, brandy, ale, that he would stay to supper, that he would meet a party at the 'Shakespeare' (aforesaid tavern next door), that he would stop and play for the manager's benefit, and so on, and so forth—he insisted on departing immediately, in company with my friend Mr. Wittington. So unassuming was his disposition, so reserved his nature, that he contrived to elude the crowd waiting at the stage door to behold him emerge. So secret were his movements in the subtlety of his oriental nature, that it was never known how he got to the railway station. Nay, the clerks and porters swore to the fact that no Indian whatsoever, or indeed any individual of a coloured race, left the station either that night or subsequently; and it was never known to any one in Slimeford how this royal and interesting amateur reached India, or the Ganges, or the Himalayas, or whatever his destination might be; whether his interview with the Secretary of State for India

was successful; whether he ever regained the throne of his forefathers, or any fact whatsoever connected with the illustrious Ramji Rowdedow.

A quarter of an hour after his departure, however, I, Mr. John Miffs, made my appearance, ready to play in the last piece, with a black rim round my left eye which my kind friends insinuated I had got in a fight on the previous evening. I can only say, in conclusion, that this was the best benefit I ever had in Slimeford, realizing the handsome sum of twenty-seven pounds fourteen shillings and fourpence; but that, taking into account the risk I ran of being torn piecemeal by infuriated weavers and dyers had my disguise been penetrated, the money was dearly earned.

TOO BRIGHT TO LAST.

LUCY DERWENT played the walking-ladies, with a share of the juvenile business, at the Theatres Royal, Slowmington, Comberly, and Drifford, on which circuit it was my humble lot to be engaged for the second old women and general utility. It must not be supposed that I really was old, or even elderly. I played old women because my personal appearance was unattractive, my stage wardrobe somewhat scanty, and my aspirations of the humblest. I came of a theatrical family: my father had been a clown, and had lost his life in consequence of an accident during the run of *Harlequin Gulliver and the Fairy Queen of Lilliput*, a very splendid pantomime, at one of the East-end London theatres, in which Mr. Maltraver's celebrated troup of infant

prodigies appeared. The infant prodigies have grown up now, and are great hulking men and women, hanging on to the theatrical profession in very subordinate positions, as I, who was an infant prodigy myself, can testify.

My father died in the heyday of his professional career, leaving my poor mother with three helpless children, of whom I was the eldest. She had been a principal dancer at one of the small theatres when my father married her, and a very pretty woman; but the coming of the children put an end to her dancing, and her beauty faded very quickly with the cares of her married life. I am compelled to admit that my father was not the best husband in the world, though he was the easiest and most good-natured of men, and loved us all dearly. But he was just as easy and good-natured with his boon companions as he was with his wife and children, and was always getting into bad company somehow, and coming home in the early dawn—oh, so tipsy and so helpless, with such a white soddened face and such limp arms and legs.

My mother went back to the stage when she was

left a widow ; but, her beauty being quite worn away, she was at a disadvantage with the managers, and was obliged to fall into a very humble position. She danced a little, and sang a little, and played small parts ; sometimes representing a lovely young heiress of seventeen, with her poor faded face and thin wasted figure and shabby dress, sometimes an old woman with wrinkles and a red nose. They used to send her on for anything, poor dear, knowing that it was a stern necessity for her to be employed, and to get bread for her three little ones.

She wore herself out at last, and when I was about sixteen I lost her. Heaven knows how bitter that loss was to me, and how all the sunshine and youth seemed to vanish out of my life when she was gone. I was an old woman from that moment, and any little talent which I may have had for the stage—and I had been rather successful in childish characters, and had received a good deal of praise in my time—departed with my happiness and hope. I had hoped for a time in which I might succeed as a leading actress, and earn a salary that would keep my mother in comfort. I had fancied the life we should

lead, and the bright happy home we might have; but this hope was gone now—I had nothing left but duty. I had my younger sister to work for—the boy had been taken in hand by a brother of my poor mother's, a small tradesman at Brompton, and was doing well; so I had only Amelia Jane to think of. She was a good girl, and used to travel everywhere with me, and to act occasionally; but I was very careful that she should not waste her time hanging about the theatre when she wasn't wanted, and I contrived to find a respectable day school for her in each of the three towns on Mr. Ponsonby's circuit.

Perhaps I am saying too much about myself, as the story I am going to tell has nothing to do with me or my affairs. I was a very humble individual in Mr. Ponsonby's company. Whatever beauty I had ever had—and up to my fifteenth birthday I had promised to be like my mother in her best days—had all left me after a severe attack of small-pox, which nearly cost me my life as well, and put an end to all my hopes of ever doing much as an actress. I was only two-and-twenty, but I had a grave, old-fashioned way that suited the old women, people said; and I

took to that line willingly enough, being glad to earn a living anyhow for Amelia Jane and myself.

I used to redden my nose night after night, until I scarcely knew what it was to appear with that feature of its natural colour; though I really don't know why it is that dramatic old age should always be distinguished by that particular infirmity; but if at any time I did venture to omit the reddening process, I was sure to be told that I had no real love for my profession, and no appreciation of character.

'Character, my dear, is what you've got to think about, if ever you want to advance a step beyond your present position,' the stage manager said to me; 'and there's nothing like a touch of vermilion at the end of the nose to give character.'

I had been jogging on in my quiet way for some years, and had got to be looked upon as a very useful person in the company. Amelia Jane was grown up by this time, and was rather a pretty girl, with a sweet soprano voice and a good deal of dramatic talent. She played all the chambermaids, and her salary was much larger than mine—not that she was

ever proud or stuck up about that; for she was the dearest, simplest little creature in the world, and fancied there was no one like her sister Martha. She had been on the stage three years—in Mr. Ponsonby's company all the time,—and I had passed my twenty-seventh birthday, and was beginning to fancy myself quite an old maid, when Lucy Derwent came to us.

I think she was the loveliest girl I ever saw in my life. I don't mean to say that I have not seen women with more perfect features, but Lucy's face had a brightness of colouring and expression that bewitched one at the first glance. I never knew any one fail to admire her. It was such a girlish, lovable beauty. Eyes that were really blue—the bright pure blue of a cloudless summer sky,—and with an innocent confiding look in them that was even lovelier than their colour; the sweetest mouth that ever smiled—and this one was always smiling; a little dimpled chin; and a complexion that was all lilies and roses, and upon which the stage paint seemed pollution. She was tall and very slim, with none of those points which are supposed to constitute a fine figure, but with a youthful grace which to my mind

more than made up for any deficiencies of that kind. Altogether she was a most charming creature, and when Mr. Ponsonby engaged her he told us he had secured a treasure. She was quite a young lady, we found. She had been educated at a boarding school, played the piano, and spoke French, Italian, and German with more or less proficiency. Her father was a barrister, a dissipated, extravagant man, who had a large family, and was always in embarrassed circumstances. So his children had been compelled to look about them and think of getting a living for themselves, and Lucy had determined to become an actress, having a passion for the stage.

Of course I did not learn these things all at once; they came out little by little, as Lucy and I got to be intimate. She took to me wonderfully from the first, as I had taken to her, and used to ask my advice about her dresses, and so on, and seemed to think a great deal of my experience. She had only been on the stage twelve months when she came to Mr. Ponsonby, and had made wonderful progress in that short time. I do not say that she was a genius; but she was very clever, and had a graceful,

easy way in everything she did, which won upon her audience, and made her a favourite at once. Our leading lady, Miss Juliet Vavasour, otherwise Mrs. Mole, who was rather a ponderous person of eight-and-thirty, with a husband in the orchestra, and a family of children at home, was not too well pleased with Miss Derwent, and was very angry and jealous when Mr. Ponsonby cast her any important part.

There never was a more light-hearted, joyous creature than Lucy when she came to us at Slowmington. The household at home was carried on in a scrambling, easy-going kind of manner, as I gathered from her talk. There were ever so many brothers and sisters, all very fond of one another, and still fonder of the mother, who was the centre of all things for them; and they contrived to take life very pleasantly somehow or other, in spite of all shortcomings on the part of the master of the house.

Lucy was full of wit and fun, dear girl, and her coming amongst us seemed quite to brighten our lives, as Amelia Jane and I used to tell her often. She lodged in the house we had always lodged in at Slowmington—a queer old-fashioned place in a

shady court at the obscure end of the town,—and little by little she got to live with us altogether, sharing our meals and dividing our expenses, declaring that I was a wonder of management and economy, and that I saved her a great deal of money by my careful ways. She was always well dressed, both on and off the stage; for she had a whole tribe of rich and fashionable cousins, who sent her great boxes of clothes in excellent condition, and she was not at all ashamed to tell us the source from which her handsome wardrobe had been derived.

'If it rested with papa to supply me, I suppose I should have to wear the same gown from year's end to year's end, for it never dawns upon him that his daughters can want gowns,' she said, laughing; 'but luckily for me, my cousins are rich and generous, and I get the reversion of all their ball and dinner dresses—much to the aggravation of their maids, I dare say.'

She was such a bright winning creature, that the simplest dress took a grace from her beauty. I was never tired of admiring her, and all her gay fascinating ways. She was very much admired by the

gentlemen of the company too, who used to gather round her in the green-room, and make quite a little court of worshippers; but she received all their compliments with a kind of gracious indifference, and seemed in no danger of losing her heart to any one of them. We used to tease her a little about these admirers; on which she would always tell us that she had never been in love, and never should be in love as long as she lived.

'What, Lucy!' cried my sister; 'do you mean to say that you are going to be an old maid?'

'I don't know about that, Amelia; one may marry without being in love, you know. If any one were to offer me a handsome house, and a carriage and pair, and plenty of servants, and all that kind of thing, I think I should be very much inclined to accept his proposal.'

'Why, Lucy, is it possible that you could be mercenary?'

'Would that be mercenary?' she asked, laughing. 'Well, I don't know; if the gentleman was not very nice, and if the carriage was a landau, I might refuse him; but if it was a barouche, and

he had dark eyes, I think I should say yes. But even then he must have a brougham as well, or how could I go to parties?'

'And what is to become of poor Mr. Ponsonby?' I said. 'I'm afraid there is no hope for him.'

Our manager was a single man, not quite forty years of age, and had proved rather fickle and capricious in his relations with the fair sex up to this time. But he had shown himself desperately smitten by Lucy Derwent, and we all of us knew that she might be Mrs. Ponsonby whenever she pleased. He was a very good fellow; not handsome by any means, but with a frank, pleasing countenance, and he was a great favourite on the Slowmington circuit, both in his private and public capacity. He was the soul of honour in all his dealings, and very kind and liberal to his company. Amelia Jane and I thought that Lucy Derwent might do worse than marry George Ponsonby. He was a clever light comedian, had acted in London for two or three seasons with considerable *éclat*, and was reputed to have saved money.

'What!' Lucy cried, with a little scream of horror, marry that old man?'

'My dear child, he is not forty.'

'If he isn't, he's awfully close to it—quite double my age, at any rate, and no barouche. Why, Patty, I might as well marry my grandpapa.'

'But if he is devotedly attached to you, as I am sure he is, and would make you a very good husband—'

'I don't want a good husband, you tiresome Patty; I want a barouche, and it must have Cee springs, and he must have dark eyes. Mr. Ponsonby's are green, or at least they were green when he was young and there was some colour in them; they are quite washed out now—a pale drab, like whity-brown paper—and his hair is exactly the same shade. And oh, if I were his wife, how tired I should be of seeing him play Charles Surface, and all manner of French marquises in a light-blue cotton velvet court suit, trimmed with tarnished silver lace! Perhaps he would want me to sit in the box office and take the money, or to stand at the wing and prompt him when he didn't know his part.'

'I'm sure he would make you the star of his theatre,' I said, 'and that you might have a very happy life.'

I had been brought up so entirely among theatrical people, that I thought to marry a prosperous provincial manager was almost the highest fate a young woman could aspire to; but Lucy Derwent only laughed at me when I told her so, and it seemed as if there was very little hope for Mr. Ponsonby.

There seemed less hope for him by and by when Mr. Roderick Macdonald came to Slowmington for a fortnight's starring engagement.

It was summer-time when this gentleman came to us, the beginning of June, and the country round about was all abloom with wild flowers. I don't think I can remember finer weather than we had just then, in all my life; not that it was by any means favourable weather for a country theatre; but oh, what delicious days, what cloudless blue skies, what a freshness and glory in the mornings, what a tender and pensive beauty in the dewy twilight, when the stars came out one by one in the opal-tinted heaven, and there was a rosy flush over all the west till nine o'clock at night!

Slowmington is a fashionable town, a great

hunting-place in winter, and a kind of inland watering-place in summer. There is a mineral spa, but I don't think many people drink the waters; and there are botanical gardens, where there are *fêtes* and archery meetings; yet at its best the town is quiet, and the visitors have rather a faded elderly look. All the country round is exquisite, and there are more walks and drives than one can easily reckon; and about the town itself, and the villas sprinkled on the green-wooded slope on the western side of the town, there is an all-pervading air of prettiness and elegance not often seen. Rich merchants and manufacturers from the great city of Hammerford have their country houses here, and the place has the drowsy, reposeful air of a town that has never had to work for its own living.

Mr. Roderick Macdonald had been starring all through England before he came to try his fortunes at Slowmington, and had met with varying success in the course of his wanderings. He was the spend-thrift heir of a good old Scottish family, an ex-captain of dragoons, who had run through a handsome fortune, and had taken to the stage as a last

resource. Wherever he went he excited considerable curiosity and interest, on account of his antecedents; and he was looked upon generally as a distinguished amateur, who acted from pure love of dramatic art. No doubt Mr. Macdonald was very fond of acting; but it must be confessed that he wanted money very badly, and looked to his dramatic genius as a source of income.

We were very curious about him at Slowmington, having heard all manner of stories about his desperate goings-on during his military career, and of his habit of knocking down any gentleman of the dramatic profession with whose opinions he happened to disagree. He had been summoned before the magistrates in several towns to answer for this little weakness of his. Having heard this of him, we expected to find him a disagreeable and supercilious kind of person, and were prepared to hold our own against him, and to demonstrate our indifference to his superior rank by every means in our power.

He played light comedy, eccentric comedy, and the broadest low comedy, having chosen his *répertoire* from a very wide field, and without reference to any

particular line of business. He had been knocking about in the theatrical profession for something less than three years, when he came to Slowmington, and had acted for a season in London, but with no marked success.

How well I remember the Saturday afternoon on which I first saw him! The company had waited for him till quite late in the afternoon, in order to rehearse one of the pieces for Monday. We had almost given him up, and were talking of going home to tea, the actors grumbling about him angrily, and saying that it was like his impudence to keep us all waiting in this manner.

The green-room at Slowmington opened into a little bit of garden, where there were a few gooseberry bushes and a sycamore tree. It was such a garden as one would have thought nothing of in any other situation; but it was quite a valuable addition to the small stuffy green-room, and in fine weather we used to sit out here when we were not wanted on the stage for rehearsal; and at night the actors used to smoke their pipes here, between whiles, during the performance.

Lucy and I were sitting on a little bench under the sycamore, when the star made his appearance at last, coming down a narrow passage leading from the stage-door, with the manager by his side. He was a very tall man, tall beyond the common height of men, and had a bright fair face, with blue eyes, and dark-brown hair curling crisply round a high, broad forehead; it was rather a Byronic head, I thought. Our manager introduced Mr. Macdonald to us. He acknowledged the introduction graciously enough, but glanced at us all very carelessly, I fancied, until he came to Lucy Derwent, when his eyes brightened all at once with a surprised admiring look, as if he had never seen anything prettier than the picture before him. And indeed it might have been so, for Lucy was looking her loveliest that afternoon, as she sat under the sycamore with her hat lying on her lap, and her sunny hair falling loosely about her face, while the shadows of the leaves flickered upon her light muslin dress.

She was to act a good deal with the stranger, and Mr. Ponsonby made this particular introduction with more *empressement* than he had shown in making the

others. He wanted to insure courteous treatment for his favourite. Perhaps when a few nights had gone by, and those two had acted together in a good many pieces, Mr. Ponsonby may have been inclined to think there was a little too much courtesy in Roderick Macdonald's manner to Miss Derwent.

The engagement did not prove a very successful one. People came for the first night or two out of curiosity, I think, anxious to see the tall ex-dragoon; but after those first nights the audiences dropped off, and the house was thinly occupied. The Botanical Gardens and the rural walks and drives round Slowmington were more attractive on these lovely June evenings than the prettiest theatre in England.

Mr. Macdonald bore this neglect with supreme good-humour. He had not knocked any one down yet, and had conducted himself altogether in a very agreeable manner. I do not know whether he was really a good actor; but I know that he made us laugh a great deal on the stage—much more than his audience ever laughed at him, but then provincial audiences are apt to be stolid. He was full of fun and nonsense; mixed up the most ridiculous sayings

of his own with the language of the author, in the wildest way, made all sorts of absurd remarks about the audience *sotto voce*, and contrived to keep Lucy in a perpetual titter all the time she was on the stage with him.

He was pleased by her laughing so readily at his jokes, he was pleased with her beauty, pleased with her gay winning manners. So long as he was acting with her he seemed not to care how empty the house was, or how cold the audience. I don't think he knew that it was empty at such times; I think the boxes were peopled and radiant for him when those two were on the stage together—he her ardent lover, she all smiles and blushes and tenderness, so natural in her girlish confusion and sweet maiden shyness, that it was difficult to believe there was any acting in the business. I told her as much one night; but she laughed, and said I was the most nonsensical creature in the world. Behind the scenes at night, and in the little garden under the sycamore every morning at rehearsal, those two used always to be together. Mr. Macdonald had been a great deal abroad, and talked French and German perfectly, I

am told. He used to converse in those languages with Lucy, and was charmed with her own imperfect schoolgirl talk, for which she was accustomed to make many blushing apologies. It is not to be supposed that such a flirtation as this could escape notice in a theatre, where people are all eyes and ears. That confidential talk in foreign tongues seemed exceedingly offensive to some members of our company. Miss Juliet Vavasour was especially indignant with what she was pleased to call Miss Derwent's carryings-on. If people were not ashamed of what they had to say, they would speak English, this lady said; and she wondered what result Miss Derwent could expect from such a flirtation with a man like Mr. Macdonald, who, of course, could have no serious or honourable intentions, and was only amusing himself at her expense. I defended my dear girl indignantly when Miss Vavasour said these bitter things; but she went on saying them all the same, and was as angry and jealous as if she had been young and single, and had wished to win Mr. Macdonald for herself. I must own, however, that the flirtation did seem rather a desperate one, and I

took occasion to lecture Lucy very gravely about her conduct, and to tell her the hard things that her enemies were beginning to say about her. When I had finished my remonstrance, she threw her arms round my neck, and hid her blushing face upon my shoulder.

'Oh, Patty,' she said, 'I love him so dearly. It is not a flirtation; it is the most serious thing in the world—it is for life or death.'

'Oh, my dear, my dear!' I cried, grieved beyond expression to discover the desperate state of the case. 'Have you considered what a wild, dissipated man Mr. Macdonald is, what a bad reputation he has?'

'I have considered nothing, Patty, except that he is the only man upon earth for me, and that I love him with all my heart. But he is not dissipated. He has been a little wild perhaps, and extravagant in the past—he says as much himself. And what of that? All generous young men are wild and extravagant.'

'What has he said to you, Lucy? Has he asked you to be his wife?'

'Oh, no, Patty. Things have not gone quite so

far as that. But I know that he loves me; he has told me so in a hundred ways. I think you can see as much as that with your own eyes, you ridiculously serious old Patty.'

'Yes, my dear; I have seen as much as that from the first night you two acted together, I think. But I don't like the business for all that, Lucy, and I am sorry you should get yourself talked about on account of a man of whom you know so little. If you were to marry Mr. Macdonald, I don't think it would be a good match, or that you would ever ride in the barouche you talk of.'

'I resign the barouche for ever,' she answered, laughing. 'I would go on drudging and toiling all my life as an obscure country actress for his sake. Yes, and redden my nose even, and play old women. What is there in this world I would not do for his sake? Oh, Patty, you don't know how noble he is, and what a charm there is in his voice and manner when he talks to me.'

'I know that he has turned your head, Lucy,' I said, 'and that's about the only sure thing I do know of him.'

It was nearly the end of the fortnight by this time, and still those two were always together. Mr. Macdonald used to escort Lucy home from rehearsal, and then he would come into our homely old-fashioned parlour, and sit there talking to us for an hour at a time, and making himself so agreeable that I could not bring myself to be uncivil to him, however doubtful and anxious I might feel; and I was very anxious, for I saw what a hold he had upon my poor girl's heart, and dreaded the issue of this affair. At night, in the soft summer moonlight—the moon was at the full at the end of that fortnight, I remember—we used to find him waiting for us at the stage-door; and he used to walk by Lucy's side, through the tranquil empty streets, while my sister and I went on a little before them. Lucy's beauty seemed to take a new radiance from her happiness just then. I fancied she grew lovelier every day, and I could not wonder that Roderick Macdonald loved her.

There was one person in the theatre who watched Lucy and her lover with a very grave and anxious countenance, and that person was Mr. Ponsonby, the

manager. He grew quite absent-minded and careless in his acting, and had a preoccupied look at all times. I was very sorry for him ; for I knew what a good fellow he was, and how truly he loved Lucy Derwent. If he had not Mr. Macdonald's brilliant manners and Byronic head, he had other qualities which seemed to me more valuable—steadiness and truth and honesty, a good temper, and a kind heart. How little we knew about the aristocratic Scotchman, except that he spoke French and German exquisitely, and had an intellectual forehead and bright blue eyes !

It came to the last day of his engagement, and I thought Mr. Macdonald looked very gloomy as the time of his departure drew near. He was to begin a week's engagement at Hammerford on Monday, and was to travel there on Sunday morning, after acting with us on Saturday evening. Lucy and I walked to the theatre together on Saturday morning, and I ventured to ask her if Mr. Macdonald had said anything serious. There had been ample time and opportunity for him to do so, had he been so minded. I think the question pained her a little, and the look

of distress in the sweet young face made me feel myself a monster of cruelty.

'No, Patty,' she answered, after a pause, 'he has said nothing yet. I think there are obstacles to his marrying yet awhile; the embarrassed state of his circumstances, perhaps. You know men are not so courageous as women in these things. They cannot face poverty as fearlessly as we can for the sake of any one we love. He speaks of himself in a very gloomy way, but so vaguely that I cannot tell what his troubles are, and I do not like to question him about them.'

We went on to the theatre in silence. My darling was very pensive. All the brightness and happiness of the last fortnight seemed to have vanished: the time of parting was so near, the sweet brief midsummer dream was coming to a dreary end.

'I wonder whether I shall ever see him again, Patty, after he leaves this place?' Lucy said to me when we were close to the stage-door.

'Of course you will, dear, if he loves you, as I am sure he does,' I answered, for her plaintive look and tone went to my heart.

'I don't know that. He spoke of our parting last night as if it was to be for ever; as if it was a good thing for both of us, somehow, that we are going to part.'

That Saturday was the warmest day we had had yet—blazing sunshine, and scarcely a breath of air. All the company was crowded into the little garden where the gooseberry-bushes grew. Mr. Macdonald was there too, lounging on the bench under the sycamore tree, with one newspaper in his hand and another on the ground at his feet.

The Slowmington press had not been kind to him. His acting was handled very severely in both the newspapers which had come out that bright June morning. He read the critiques aloud, and laughed at them with a bitter strident laugh, and cursed the critics of Slowmington very freely. He was so engrossed by this occupation that he did not look up as Lucy and I came into the garden. Yes, the dream was over; this Saturday morning was the awakening. We went into the green-room, and Lucy sat down in a corner to study her part. She had a very important character in a comedy to play that night,

and I think her mind was so full of other things that she found it harder than usual to cram the words into her poor little head. We were quite alone in the green-room, but we could hear the voices in the garden outside, and Mr. Macdonald's bitter laughter. He came in by-and-by, and shook hands with Lucy; but there was no happy talk in foreign languages between those two to-day. Of course the Slowmington critics were utterly insignificant and contemptible in his eyes, as he declared they were; but I think the adverse criticism galled him a little nevertheless. And then his engagement had been altogether an unprofitable one. It was scarcely strange that he should look discontented and gloomy this morning.

The rehearsal was a long one, and dragged on wearily for several hours. The last thing to be rehearsed was a farce in which there were very few characters—only Mr. Macdonald, Mr. Fitzwarren the walking gentleman, Lucy Derwent, and myself. We were rehearsing this quite late in the afternoon, and Lucy and I were together in the green-room while the two men were on the stage, when Mr. Ponsonby came in from a little closet-like room

that was called the treasury, where he transacted all the business of the theatre, with the casts of the pieces for the following week, and began to hang them up in the little frame over the chimney-piece. Yes, the world was to go on all the same after Roderick Macdonald was gone, and pieces were to be studied and acted, and all the common round of daily drudgery was to continue, just as if that bright break in Lucy Derwent's life had never come. I knew she was thinking this as she looked up wearily at Mr. Ponsonby, without a spark of interest in the pieces for the coming week, about which she would have been so curious and eager a fortnight ago. The manager loitered a little over his task, whistling softly to himself, dawdling for a purpose, I fancied; and in that moment a nervous feeling came over me, just as if I had known that there was something painful coming.

'Macdonald seems rather out of sorts to-day,' he said at last, with his back still towards us, as he stood at the mantelpiece. 'They certainly have walked into him awfully in the *Mercury* and *Midland Chronicle;* but it doesn't need much

of a critic to see that the man's no actor. I suppose he'll go home to his wife, after his Hammerford engagement, and that she'll console him for all his failures.'

'His wife!' I cried, turning cold and faint. 'Is Mr. Macdonald married?'

'So it seems,' Mr. Ponsonby answered, looking round at us for the first time. 'I didn't know it till this morning, or I should'—he hesitated for a moment, looking at Lucy—'I should have let others know it. I had a letter from a friend in London by to-day's post, telling me a good deal about our friend Macdonald. He has been married ever since he was quite a youth to a Frenchwoman ten years his senior. I don't know if they live together; but she is a very handsome woman, I hear, and was on the stage in Paris when he first saw her. I suppose it was this marriage that gave him a fancy for turning actor.'

I don't know whether he meant to be cruel; jealousy and anger had made him hard, perhaps, even towards Lucy. I know that the blow struck home. The fair young face grew white to the very

lips, but my poor darling betrayed her trouble by no other sign just then. There was a dead silence in the room, and we heard Mr. Macdonald's step on the gravel in the little garden outside as he came out of the theatre. What a leaden gloom there seemed in the place, which was wont to be so noisy and uproarious with the talk and laughter of the actors!

Lucy got up from her seat presently, and went slowly out of the room. I knew that she was going straight to speak to Mr. Macdonald, to ask him whether this thing was true or not. I was sitting by the window, and could see him as he sat on his favourite seat under the sycamore, leaning forward with a very gloomy face, and scratching figures on the gravel with the point of his cane. He looked very interesting, I thought, with that melancholy expression in his pale face; and there was more pity for him than anger against him in my heart. Mr. Ponsonby thrust his hands in his pockets, and planted himself with his back against the empty fireplace, in a dogged kind of way.

'She ought to know it,' he muttered. 'It is only right for her to know.'

'I think you might have broken it to her a little more kindly,' I said to him, rather indignantly.

'Broken it! stuff and nonsense!' he answered, angrily. 'What breaking can there be wanted in such a case? What can she care about a man whom she has only known a fortnight—a dire bad actor into the bargain? I'm sure his buffoonery in Charles Surface, and his gagging in Young Marlow, were beneath contempt.'

I did not reply to this; I was looking out at the scene under the sycamore tree.

Lucy had gone slowly up to Mr. Macdonald, and had asked him some question. I could see the pale lips move, though the voice was so low and faint that I could not hear so much as a murmur. I saw him look up at her with a start, and with a sudden sharp anguish in his face that made it haggard and old-looking all in a moment.

'Yes,' he said at last, 'the murder's out. It's true. Some kind friend has told you, I suppose. Yes, it's true;' and then, as she stood before him silently, he stretched out his hands to her in a pleading, despairing way.

'Oh, my love, my love, forgive me!' he cried.

Lucy Derwent gave a little gasping sob, and fell down at his feet in a dead faint. I ran out to the garden directly, the manager after me. Mr. Macdonald had raised her from the ground by that time, and was holding her in his arms, imploring her to forgive him, and calling himself a brute and a villain.

'Yes, you may well say that. You have proved yourself a most consummate villain!' Mr. Ponsonby said, savagely.

The Scotchman turned on him fiercely, with his fists clenched, and I remembered that propensity for knocking people down for which this gentleman had distinguished himself.

He did not attack Mr. Ponsonby, however, and bore the reproof meekly enough.

'*You* needn't insult me,' he said, in a gloomy tone. 'You needn't hit a fellow that's down. I'm low enough, God knows. I know that I have been a villain to her, but not a deliberate villain. I love her with all my heart and soul. If she would trust herself to me, I would be her slave, would sacrifice every hope I have in the world for her sake. Yet I

love her so well, that I would not ask her to do that for my life. She is as innocent and pure as the angels, and I have not said a word to her that I might not say to my sister. But I love her—O my God, how I love her!'

He held her all this time, supported by one strong arm, and with her fair head lying on his breast, happily unconscious still. He looked down at her—oh, so tenderly!—as the sweet pale face lay there.

'No, my love,' he said, with a smile, 'I will not wrong you by so much as a kiss unawares.'

She came back to life presently with a convulsive sigh, and I think the fulness of her trouble flashed upon her with the first moment of returning consciousness.

'Let us go home, Patty,' she said, quietly; 'the rehearsal is finished, isn't it?'

It was not quite finished; but Mr. Ponsonby nodded to me, and said, 'Yes, get her home.'

Mr. Macdonald had withdrawn his arm from her the moment she recovered. He stood a little way apart now, watching her with a look that was half

tenderness, half despair. I have no doubt I ought to have been very angry with him for the duplicity that had caused all this mischief; but I could not for the life of me feel anything but pity for him.

We walked slowly home in the afternoon sunshine, Lucy leaning on my arm. I did not speak to her once in all the way. I knew that such a grief as hers would be best suffered in silence, and that any attempt at consolation must be worse than useless. She went straight to her room when we got home, and I promised to take her a cup of tea there presently. We were in the habit of taking tea and dinner together after a late rehearsal, in the homely fashion which women like; but I felt pretty sure that Lucy would eat little or nothing this afternoon.

When I went to her with the tea, I found her sitting with a play-book on her lap, staring absently at the page. She had not even taken off her walking things. I took off her hat and mantle, and got her to bathe her face in cold water, and sat by her while she drank a cup of tea, and ate a little piece of bread-and-butter, to please me. Then I persuaded her to lie down upon the bed, and rest until it was time to

go to the theatre. It was no good trying to study—the words would come to her somehow at night, I had no doubt. She obeyed me in her own sweet, gentle way, and I darkened the room for her, and left her lying down with her face turned to the wall.

Up to this time she had not shed a tear; but I think the tears came all at once now; for when I crept softly to her door a few minutes later I heard her low, suppressed sobbing, and I was not sorry that this relief should come to her.

At six o'clock she came to our sitting-room, with a pale fixed face, but no obvious traces of her tears, dressed ready to start for the theatre. We walked there together, she and I, my sister not being wanted till a later hour. How the fashionable life of Slowmington jarred upon me that evening!—the gaily-dressed people walking and driving in the serene sunshine, the bright-looking shops, the aspect of happiness that there was in the place.

I don't think Lucy Derwent ever acted so well as she acted that night. I had been afraid that she might break down; and had only hoped at the best that she would get through her parts somehow. But

the fever and excitement of her mind gave a new vivacity to her acting. She threw herself into the character she was playing with an utter abandonment. Mr. Ponsonby stood at the wing, wondering at her brightness and animation.

'She's not much the worse for my news, you see,' he said to me with rather a triumphant air, 'in spite of her faint this afternoon: girls faint for next to nothing. Of course it was only a flirtation on her side, whatever it may have been on Macdonald's, and the poor beggar did look awfully cut up, I confess.'

'Oh, of course,' I said, not caring to contradict him.

I saw Lucy and Mr. Macdonald at the wings in the intervals of their acting, talking together very earnestly. He told her the story of his life that night, a story which she told me afterwards, a common story enough, of a boy's foolish marriage and a man's bitter repentance. The night came to an end only too soon for those two, I think, who found some sweetness amongst the pain of those parting hours. I did not witness their final farewell; they were

alone together in the little garden for a few minutes while I finished dressing—Lucy waiting for me to join her. Perhaps I purposely lingered a little over my toilet that night, willing that they should have those last moments together.

Mr. Macdonald had gone when I went downstairs, and Lucy was waiting for me alone in the garden. It was a wet night; but I doubt if the poor child knew it was raining till I told her so.

'He is gone, Patty,' she said, 'for ever and ever. I shall never see him again. It is better so, of course; but, oh, how blank and dull the world will seem without him, and what an old, old woman I feel!'

'My dear love, all that will pass away. Why, you have only known him two short weeks! It cannot be a very serious feeling on either side.'

'You don't know, Patty. Those two weeks seem half my life to me, and the brightest half of my life. He asked me to let him kiss me; just once, Patty.' He stood by my side, bare-headed, pleading so earnestly just for one kiss, and I said, "No." But now he is gone, I wish I had let him kiss me; I wish I had not been so hard and cruel.'

'My dear child, you only did what was right he has had a great deal too much indulgence as it is. He had no right to conceal the fact of his marriage, or to flirt with you as he did.'

'He had not the heart to tell me the truth. Don't be hard upon him, Patty. You don't know how generous and noble he is. I don't think there's a woman in the world who could help loving him. Oh, how I wish I had let him kiss me!'

She trusted me so thoroughly, poor child, and laid her heart bare before me with such entire candour and simplicity. Many, many times after that night, in our talk of Roderick Macdonald she would return to the old regret: 'Oh, Patty, I wish I had let him kiss me!'

Our lives went on quietly and peacefully enough after the star had vanished out of our tranquil sky. Lucy Derwent did not fall ill of a brain fever, as she ought to have done perhaps under the circumstances, nor did she exhibit any outward tokens of her grief. She took more pains with her acting than usual, I know, and seemed as gay and light-hearted as ever in the green-room, where she knew there were eager

eyes watching for any sign of her trouble. But at home, with us whom she trusted, she was sadly changed. She would sit alone in her room for hours together, with an open book lying unheeded on her lap; and when we persuaded her to join us she was dull and silent, and we never heard her old joyous laugh, or her pretty voice singing over her work. She suffered all the more at home, I think, on account of the effort which she made to appear her old self at the theatre.

We heard of Mr. Macdonald at the different towns, where he was starring with more or less success; and then, at the end of about six months, there came the news that he was going to Australia, to try his dramatic fortunes in that colony.

'I was right, you see, Patty,' Lucy said to me, when she read this announcement in a theatrical journal; 'I shall never see him again.'

'My dear child, he will come back from Australia in a year or so, I dare say, and there will be just as good a chance of your seeing him as if he had never been there.'

'No, Patty, I shall never see him again. We

both felt that last miserable night that we should never meet again; and he asked me to let him kiss me, and I wouldn't.'

It was midsummer weather again, and we were at Slowmington once more, Lucy still with us, and Mr. Ponsonby more devoted to her than ever. She had brightened a good deal by this time, and I thought she was beginning to forget Mr. Macdonald. She was a great favourite with the audience in all our three towns, and her salary had been raised; so that she was able to send home a little money to her mother now and then, which helped that anxious housekeeper in some of her minor embarrassments.

'If it is only enough to pay the milk bill, it is something, you see, Patty,' Lucy said to me in her candid way.

And so the time went on, peacefully enough. We had an especially prosperous season at Slowmington that year, and the autumn found us still at the pretty little inland watering-place. Early in October George Ponsonby's fidelity had its reward, and I had the happiness of appearing in the character of bridesmaid

to Lucy Derwent, who signed herself 'Lucy Dawson in the register, by the way, in which record Mr. Ponsonby wrote himself down 'George Payne.'

Yes, she had accepted this faithful lover at last, grateful for his devotion, flattered by his belief in her talents, and preferring the tranquil home he could give her to the worries and confusions of her father's house. That she really loved him, I did not for a moment believe; but I was pleased that she should marry him, nevertheless, and I had no doubt that the quiet, undemonstrative affection which best insures the happiness of domestic life would grow up in my darling's heart in good time. I knew that she was faithful and true, and that she would neglect no duty which she pledged herself to perform before the altar in the shadowy old parish church. Nor was I mistaken in this. She made the fairest, brightest, most delightful wife that ever a man won for himself, and her husband seemed to grow prouder of her, and fonder of her every day. He was very generous to her too, and she told me she was now able to send frequent help to the poor overtasked mother at home.

They had been married nearly six months, and we were at Drifford, a manufacturing town, very black and smoky, famous for gigantic pigs and savoury pork pies. The inhabitants consumed enormous quantities of pork pie in the pit and gallery during the evening's entertainment; indeed, if times were bad, and these people could not afford ample supplies of pork pie, they would stay away from the theatre, preferring to abstain from the drama altogether, rather than witness it unfortified by their favourite refreshment. We were at Drifford, and it was the end of March—gloomy, blustrous weather, with a cold gray sky, and frequent showers of wind-driven rain that used to beat into my face and almost blind me during the walk from my lodgings to the theatre—and I think I remember this time especially on account of an event which tried my poor Lucy's fortitude sorely.

I was at rehearsal on one of these cold rainy mornings, when the theatre had an unusually dark and dismal appearance, and when every member of the company seemed either out of temper or out of spirits. I was standing at one of the wings, trying

to cram the words of a long unprofitable part into my head, when the manager came up to me.

'Oh, Patty,' he said—he had taken to calling me 'Patty,' like his wife,—'I wish you would just step round and have a little chat with Lucy; she's not quite the thing this morning, and I dare say you can cheer her up if you try.'

'I should be very pleased to go to her,' I said, 'but I'm on all through this piece.'

'Never mind that. It'll be rehearsed again to-morrow, you know. Wilcox shall read your part. There, run along, that's a good soul, and look after Lucy.'

I could see that he was very pale, and had a troubled look which I had never seen in his face since that Saturday night at Slowmington. I hurried out of the theatre, and to Mr. Ponsonby's lodgings, which were very pleasant rooms not far off. I know the drawing-room used to seem to me quite a splendid apartment, which I fancied any lady might have been proud to occupy. But then I had not seen many drawing-rooms, and this may have appeared to me grander than it really was

Lucy made very light of her luxurious surroundings.

She came to me, a few moments after I had been shown into this room, pale to the lips, and with an unspeakable sadness in her face. She had a newspaper in one hand, and she was still holding this when she threw herself into my arms, and hid her poor white face upon my shoulder.

'I heard that you were ill, dear,' I said, 'and Mr. Ponsonby sent me here to see if I could be of any use to my pet. You know how anxious he always is about you.'

'He is very good to me,' she answered, in a low, tremulous voice; 'oh, so much better than I deserve. He knows now how unworthy I am of his goodness. I kept my secret from him till to-day, but he knows all now.'

'All what, you foolish child?'

'He is dead, Patty,' she answered, with a sob.

'Who is dead?'

'Roderick Macdonald. It was in the paper this morning. He died at Melbourne, of rheumatic fever. He was only twenty-nine. Oh, Patty, I

told you that I should never see him again. And to think that he should have prayed so hard for that one last kiss, and I refused it! He is dead, Patty. Oh, if I could only have kissed him in his coffin!'

'My darling, this talk is so foolish—wicked even. I am very sorry to hear of Mr. Macdonald's death; but, if he had lived, no good could have come out of a meeting between you and him. You have no right to grieve for him like this, Lucy.'

'Oh, I know that,' she answered, impatiently. 'No right! I tell you, Patty, he was the only man I ever loved in all my life.'

'Oh, Lucy! And your poor good husband!'

'I told him I had no heart to give him. I only promised to do my duty.'

'And you will keep that promise, darling, and love will come by and by. Yes, it will come, my dear, I am sure of that; and you will forget that you ever cared for Roderick Macdonald.'

She shook her head sadly, and then we sat down side by side, her poor weary head resting on my shoulder. She showed me the brief paragraph in the

London paper by and by, and I let her talk as long as she pleased about her dead lover. I knew somehow that things would come right in time; and so they did. Time drew Lucy's gentle heart nearer to her good and faithful husband, and took the edge off that old regret. Mr. and Mrs. Ponsonby have three pretty children, and seem to me a perfectly happy couple; but I think even yet there are moments when Lucy's thoughts slip away from the little one on her lap, and there rises before her the vision of a face that shall never be seen again upon this earth.

THE SCENE-PAINTER'S WIFE.

'You wouldn't think it to look at her now, sir,' said the old clown, as he shook the ashes out of his blackened clay, 'but madam was once as handsome a woman as you'd see for many a long day. It was an accident that spoilt her beauty.'

The speaker was attached to a little equestrian company with which I had fallen in during a summer day's pedestrianism in Warwickshire. The troupe had halted at a roadside inn, where I was dawdling over my mid-day meal, and by the time I had smoked my cigar in his companionship, the clown and I were upon a footing of perfect friendliness.

I had been not a little struck by the woman of whom he spoke. She was tall and slim, and had something of a foreign look, as I thought. Her face

was chiefly remarkable for the painful impression which it gave to a stranger. It was the face of a woman who had suffered some great terror. The sickly pallor of the skin was made conspicuous by the hectic brightness of the large black eyes, and on one cheek there was a scar—the mark of some deadly hurt inflicted long ago.

My new friend and I had strolled a little way from the inn, where the rest of the company were still occupied with their frugal dinner. A stretch of sunny common lay before us, and seemed to invite a ramble. The clown filled his pipe and walked on meditatively. I took out another cigar.

'Was it a fall from horseback that gave her that scar?' I asked.

'A fall from horseback! Madame Delavanti! No, sir, that seam on her cheek was made by the claws of a tiger. It's rather a curious sort of story, and I don't mind telling it, if you'd like to hear it, but for goodness' sake don't let her know I've been talking of her, if you should happen to scrape acquaintance with her when you go back to the inn.

'Has she such a dislike to being talked about?'

'I rather think she has. You see she's not quite right in the upper story, poor soul; but she's a clipper to ride, and doesn't know what fear means. You'd scarcely believe how handsome she looks at night when she's dressed for the ring. Her face lights up almost as well as it used to do ten years ago, before she had the accident. Ah, she was a beauty in those days, and used to be run after by all the gentlemen like mad. But she never was a bad lot, never—wild and self-willed, but never a wicked woman, as I'll stake my life. I've been her friend through thick and thin when she needed a friend, and I've understood her better than others.

'She was only twelve years old when first she came to us with her father, a noted lion-tamer. He was a man who drank hard now and then, and was very severe with her at such times; but she always had a brave spirit, and I never knew her to quail before him or before the beasts. She used to take her share in all the old man's performances, and when he died and the lions were sold off our proprietor kept a tiger for her to perform with. He was the cleverest of all the animals, but a queer

temper, and it needed a spirit like Caroline Delavanti's to face him. She used to ride in the circus as well as perform with the tiger, and she was altogether the most valuable member of the company, and was very well paid for her work. She was eighteen when her father died, and within a year of his death she married Joseph Waylie, our scene-painter.

'I was rather surprised at this marriage, for I fancied Caroline might have done better. Joe was thirty-five, if he was a day—a pale, sandy-haired fellow, not much to look at, and by no means a genius. But he was awfully fond of Caroline. He had followed her about like a dog ever since she came among us, and I thought she married him more out of pity than love. I told her so one day, but she only laughed and said,—

'"He's too good for me, Mr. Waters, that's the truth. I don't deserve to be loved as he loves me."

'The newly-married couple seemed to be very happy together. It was a treat to see Joe stand at the wing and watch his wife through her performances, ready to put a shawl over her pretty

white shoulders when she had done, or to throw himself between her and the tiger in case of mischief. She treated him in a pretty patronizing sort of way, as if he had been ever so much younger than she, instead of twelve years her senior. She used to stand upon tiptoe and kiss him before all the company sometimes at a rehearsal, much to his delight. He worked like a slave in the hope of improving his position as he improved in his art, and he thought nothing too good for his beautiful young wife. They had very comfortable lodgings about half a mile from the manufacturing town where we were stationed for the winter months, and lived as well as simple folks need live.

'Our manager was proprietor of a second theatre, at a seaport town fifty miles away; and when pantomime time was coming on, poor Joseph Waylie was ordered off to paint the scenery for this other theatre, much to his grief, as his work was likely to keep him a month or six weeks away from his wife. It was their first parting, and the husband felt it deeply. He left Caroline to the care of an old woman who took the money, and who professed

a very warm attachment for Mrs. Waylie, or Madame Delavanti, as she was called in the bills.

'Joseph had not been gone much more than a week when I began to take notice of a young officer who was in front every evening, and who watched Caroline's performance with evident admiration. I saw him one night in very close conversation with Mrs. Muggleton, the money-taker, and was not over-pleased to hear Madame Delavanti's name mentioned in the course of their conversation. On the next night I found him loitering about at the stage door. He was a very handsome man, and I could not avoid taking notice of him. On inquiry, I found that his name was Jocelyn, and that he was a captain in the regiment then stationed in the town. He was the only son of a wealthy manufacturer, I was told, and had plenty of money to throw about.

'I had finished my performance earlier than usual one night soon after this, and was waiting for a friend at the stage door, when Captain Jocelyn came up the dark by-street, smoking his cigar, and evidently waiting for some one. I fell back into the shadow of the doorway, and waited, feeling pretty sure that

he was on the watch for Caroline. I was right. She came out presently and joined him, putting her hand under his arm, as if it was quite a usual thing for him to be her escort. I followed them at a little distance as they walked off, and waited till I saw Joe's wife safe within her own door. The captain detained her on the door-step talking for a few minutes, and evidently would have liked to have kept her there longer, but she dismissed him with that pretty imperious way she had with all of us at times.

'Now, as a very old friend of Caroline's, I wasn't going to stand this sort of thing; so I taxed her with it plainly next day, and told her no good could come of any acquaintance between her and Captain Jocelyn.

'"And no harm need come of it either, you silly old fellow," she said. "I've been used to that sort of attention all my life. There's nothing but the most innocent flirtation between us."

'"What would Joe think of such an innocent flirtation, Caroline?" I asked.

'"Joe must learn to put up with such things," she

answered, "as long as I do my duty to him. I can't live without excitement, and admiration, and that sort of thing. Joe ought to know that as well as I do."

'"I should have thought the tiger and the horses would have given you enough excitement, Caroline," I said, "without running into worse dangers than the risk of your life."

'"But they don't give me half enough excitement," she answered; and then she took out a little watch in a jewelled case, and looked at it, and then at me in a half-boastful, half-nervous way.

'"Why, what a pretty watch, Carry!" said I. "Is that a present from Joe?"

'"As if you didn't know better than that!" she said. "Country scene-painters can't afford to buy diamond watches for their wives, Mr. Waters."

'I tried to lecture her, but she laughed off my reproaches; and I saw her that night with a bracelet on her arm which I knew must be another gift from the captain. He was in a stage box, and threw her a bouquet of choice flowers after her scene with the tiger. It was the prettiest sight in the world to see

her pick up the flowers and offer them to the grim-looking animal to smell, and then snatch them away with a laugh, and retire, curtseying to the audience and glancing coquettishly towards the box where her admirer sat applauding her.

'Three weeks went by like this, the captain in front every night. I kept a close watch upon the pair, for I thought that, however she might carry on her flirtation, Joe's wife was true at heart, and would not do him any deliberate wrong. She was very young and very wilful, but I fancied my influence would go a long way with her in any desperate emergency. So I kept an eye upon her and her admirer, and there was rarely a night that I did not see the captain's back turned upon the door of Mrs. Waylie's lodgings before I went home to my own supper.

'Joe was not expected home for another week, and the regiment was to leave the town in a couple of days. Caroline told me this one morning with evident pleasure, and I was overjoyed to find she did not really care for Captain Jocelyn.

"'Not a bit, you silly old man," she said; "I like his admiration, and I like his presents, but I know

there's no one in the world worth Joe. I'm very glad the regiment will be gone when Joe comes back. I shall have had my bit of fun, you know, and I shall tell Joe all about it; and as Captain Jocelyn will have gone to the other end of the world, he can't object to the presents—tributes offered to my genius, as the captain says in his notes."

'I felt by no means sure that Joseph Waylie would consent to his wife's retaining these tributes, and I told her as much.

'"Oh, nonsense!" she said; "I can do what I like with Joe. He'll be quite satisfied when he sees Captain Jocelyn's respectful letters. I couldn't part with my darling little watch for the world."

'When I went to the theatre next evening I found the captain standing talking to Caroline just inside the stage door. He seemed very earnest, and was begging her to do something which she said was impossible. It was his last night in the town, you see, and I have very little doubt that he was asking her to run away with him—for I believe the man was over head and ears in love with her—and that she was putting him off in her laughing, coquettish way.

'"I won't take your answer now," he said, very seriously. "I shall wait for you at the door to-night. You can't mean to break my heart, Caroline; the answer must be, 'Yes.'"

'She broke away from him hurriedly. "Hark!" she said, "there's the overture; and in half an hour I must be upon the stage."

'I passed the captain in the dark passage, and a few paces farther on passed some one else whose face I could not see, but whose short, hurried breathing sounded like that of a person who had been running. We brushed against one another as we passed, but the man took no notice of me.

'Half an hour afterwards I was lounging in a corner of the ring while Caroline went through her performances with the tiger. Captain Jocelyn was in his usual place, with a bouquet in his hand. It was New Year's night, and the house was very full. I had been looking all round for some time, when I was startled by the sight of a face in the pit. It was Joseph Waylie's face, ashy pale, and fixed as death—a face that meant mischief.

'"He has heard something against his wife," I

thought. "I'll run round to him directly I can get out of the ring, and make matters square. Some confounded scandal-monger has got hold of him, and has been poisoning his mind about Caroline and the captain." I knew there had been a good deal of talk in the theatre about those two—talk which I had done my best to put down.

'Captain Jocelyn threw his bouquet, which was received with a coquettish smile and a bright upward glance that seemed to express profound delight. I knew that this was mere stage-play; but how must it have looked to the jealous man, glaring with fixed eyes from his place at the back of the pit! I turned to look at him as the curtain fell upon the stage, but he was gone. He was going round to speak to his wife, no doubt. I left the ring immediately, and went to prepare her for the interview, and, if needful, to stand between her and her husband's anger.

'I found her at the wing, trifling with her bouquet in an absent way.

'"Have you seen Joe?" I asked.

'"No," she answered. "He hasn't come back, has he? I didn't expect him for a week."

'"I know, my dear; but I saw him in the pit just now, looking as pale as a ghost. I'm afraid some one has been talking to him about you."

'She looked rather frightened when I said this.

'"They can't say any harm of me if they speak the truth," she said. "I wonder Joe didn't come straight to me though, instead of going to the front of the house."

'We were both wanted in the ring. I helped Caroline through her equestrian performance, and saw that she was a little nervous and anxious about Joe's return. She did not favour the captain with many more smiles that evening, and she told me to be ready for her at the stage door ten minutes before the performance was over.

'"I want to give Captain Jocelyn the slip," she said; "but I dare say Joe will come to me before I'm ready."

'Joe did not appear, however, and she went home with me. I met the captain on my way back, and he asked me if I had been seeing Mrs. Waylie home. I told him yes, and that her husband had come home. Joe had not arrived at the lodgings,

however, when Caroline went in, and I returned to the theatre to look for him. The stage door was shut when I went back; so I supposed that Joe had gone home by another way, or was out drinking. I went to bed that night very uneasy in my mind about Caroline and her husband.

'There was an early rehearsal of a new interlude next morning, and Caroline came into the theatre five minutes after I got there. She looked pale and ill. Her husband had not been home.

'"I think it must have been a mistake of yours about Joe," she said to me. "I don't think it could have been he you saw in the pit last night."

'"I saw him as surely as I see you at this moment, my dear," I answered. "There's no possibility of a mistake. Joe came back last night, and Joe was in the pit while you were on with the tiger."

'This time she looked really frightened. She put her hand to her heart suddenly, and began to tremble.

'"Why didn't he come home to me?" she cried, "and where did he hide himself last night?"

'"I'm afraid he must have gone out upon the drink, my dear."'

'"Joe never drinks,"' she answered.

'While she stood looking at me with that pale scared face, one of our young men came running towards us.

'"You're wanted, Waters," he said, shortly.

'"Where?"

'"Upstairs in the painting-room."

'"Joe's room!" cried Caroline. "Then he has come back. I'll go with you."

'She was following me as I crossed the stage, but the young man tried to stop her.

'"You'd better not come just yet, Mrs. Waylie," he said, in a hurried way. "It's only Waters that's wanted on a matter of business." And then, as Caroline followed close behind us, he took hold of my arm and whispered, "Don't let her come."

'I tried to keep her back, but it was no use.

'"I know it's my husband who wants you," she said. "They've been making mischief about me. You shan't keep me away from him."

'We were on the narrow stairs leading to the

painting-room by this time. I couldn't keep Caroline off. She pushed past both of us, and ran into the room before we could stop her.

'"Serve her right," muttered my companion. "It's all her doing."

'I heard her scream as I came to the door. There was a little crowd in the painting-room round a quiet figure lying on a bench, and there was a ghastly pool of blood upon the floor. Joseph Waylie had cut his throat.

'"He must have done it last night," said the manager. "There's a letter for his wife on the table yonder. Is that you, Mrs. Waylie? A bad business, isn't it? Poor Joseph!"

'Caroline knelt down by the side of the bench, and stopped there on her knees, as still as death, till the room was clear of all but me.

'"They think I deserve this, Waters," she said, lifting her white face from the dead man's shoulder, where she had hidden it; "but I meant no harm. Give me the letter."

'"You'd better wait a bit, my dear," I said.

'"No, no; give it me at once, please."

'I gave her the letter. It was very short. The scene-painter had come back to the theatre in time to hear some portion of that interview between Captain Jocelyn and his wife. He evidently had believed her much more guilty than she was.

'"I think you must know how I loved you, Caroline," he wrote; "I can't face life with the knowledge that you've been false to me."

'Of course there was an inquest. We worked it so that the jury gave a verdict of temporary insanity, and poor Joe was buried decently in the cemetery outside the town. Caroline sold the watch and the bracelet that Captain Jocelyn had given her, in order to pay for her husband's funeral. She was very quiet, and went on with the performances as usual a week after Joe's death, but I could see a great change in her. The rest of the company were very hard upon her, as I thought, blaming her for her husband's death, and she was under a cloud, as it were; but she looked as handsome as ever, and went through all her performances in her old daring way. I'm sure, though, that she grieved sincerely for Joe's death, and that she had never meant to do him wrong.

'We travelled all through the next summer, and late in November went back to Homersleigh. Caroline had seemed happier while we were away, I thought, and when we were going back she confessed as much to me.

'"I've got a kind of dread of seeing that place again," she said; "I'm always dreaming of the painting-room as it looked that January morning with the cold light streaming in upon that dreadful figure on the bench. That room has scarcely been out of my dreams one night since I've been away from Homersleigh; and now I dread going back as if—as if *he* was shut up there."

'The room was not a particularly convenient one, and it had been used for lumber after Joe's death. The man who came after him didn't care to paint there by himself all day long. On the first morning of our return, Caroline went up and looked in at the dusty heap of disused stage furniture and broken properties. I met her coming away from the room.

'"Oh, Mr. Waters," she said to me with real feeling, "if he had only waited to hear me speak for myself! They all think I deserved what happened,

and perhaps I did, as far as it was a punishment for my vanity and foolishness; but Joe didn't deserve such a fate. I know it was their malicious talk that did the mischief."

'I fancied after this that her looks changed for the worse, and that she had a kind of nervous way in going through her work in the ring, as if there was a fever upon her. I couldn't judge so well how she went through the tiger act, as I was never on the stage with her, but the brute seemed as submissive as ever. On the last day of the year she asked our manager to let her off for the next night. "It's the anniversary of my husband's death," she said.

'"I didn't know you were so precious fond of him," he answered, with a sneer. "No, Mrs. Waylie, we can't afford to dispense with your services to-morrow night. The tiger act is one of our strong features with the gallery, and I expect a full house for New Year's night."

'She begged him very hard to let her off, but it was no use. There was no rehearsal on New Year's morning, and she went to the little cemetery where Joe was buried, a three miles' walk in the

cold and rain. In the evening, when she came to the wing, her eyes were brighter than usual, and she shivered a good deal, more than I liked to see.

'"I think I must have caught cold in the cemetery to-day," she said to me when I noticed this. "I wish I could have kept this night sacred—this one night—to my husband's memory. He has been in my mind so much to-day."

'She went on, and I stood at the wing watching her. The audience applauded vociferously, but she did not make her accustomed curtsey; and she went about her work in a listless way that was very different from her usual spirited style. The animal seemed to know this, and when she had got about half way through her tricks with him he began to respond to her word of command in a sulky, unwilling manner that I didn't like. This made her angry, and she used her light whip more freely than usual.

'One of the tiger's concluding tricks was a leap through a garland of flowers which Caroline held for him. She was kneeling in the centre of the stage with this garland in her hands, ready for the

animal's spring, when her eyes wandered to the front of the house, and she rose suddenly, with a shrill scream, and her arms outstretched wildly. Whether the sulky brute thought that she was going to strike him or not, I don't know; but he sprang savagely at her as she rose, and in the next moment she was lying on the ground helpless, and the audience screaming with terror. I rushed upon the stage with half a dozen others, and we had the brute muzzled and roped in a few breathless moments, but not before he had torn Caroline's cheek and shoulder with his claws. She was insensible when we carried her off the stage, and she was confined to her bed three months after the accident with brain fever. When she came among us again she had lost every vestige of colour, and her face had that set look which you must have observed just now.

'The fright of her encounter with the tiger gave her that look,' I said; 'I don't much wonder at it.'

'Not a bit of it,' answered the clown. 'That's the curious part of the story. She didn't think anything of her skirmish with the tiger, though it quite spoilt her beauty. What frightened her was

the sight of her husband sitting in the pit, as he had sat there a year before, on the night of his death Of course you'll say it was a delusion, and so say I. But she declares she saw him sitting amongst the crowd—amongst them, and yet not one of them, somehow, with a ghastly glare upon his face that marked him out from the rest. It was the sight of him that made her drop her garland and give that scream and start which frightened the tiger. You see she had been brooding upon his death for a long time, and no doubt she conjured up his image out of her own brain, as it were. She's never been quite the same since that fever; but she has plenty of pluck, and there's scarcely anything she can't do now with Baber the tiger, and I think she's fonder of him than of any human creature, in spite of the scar on her cheek.'

SIR LUKE'S RETURN.

To say that Cadbury Hall had stood untenanted and dismantled within the memory of the oldest inhabitant of Cadbury village would be to say too much, for there were two or three aged men and women in Springfield Union who remembered old Sir Luke Cadbury, and the good old days when the hounds used to meet in front of Cadbury Hall, and old Sir Luke, steeped to the lips in debt, and with every acre of his estate encumbered, used to keep open house, and entertain the county in a liberal and large-hearted fashion, at the expense of the local tradesmen. Having mortgaged his last acre, and plunged as deep in debt as his creditors would allow, old Sir Luke found himself at the end of his tether; so he took the easiest way out of his difficulties by dying, and leaving the empty shell of his estate to his only son.

Young Sir Luke, not seeing his way to living luxuriously upon an estate whose revenues were swallowed up by the mortgagees, looked about him for some more promising mode of existence. He was nineteen years of age when he came into his property. He had been at an expensive public school, where he had learned to row, swim, and thrash boys of superior weight and size. A little Latin and less Greek had been flogged into him, but, acquired thus unpleasantly, had oozed out of him very quickly. He took a day to learn a verb, with much tribulation of mind and sweat of brow, and he forgot it comfortably in half an hour. At home he learned to ride straight to hounds, and shoot his bird flying. Happily he was a young man of energetic temperament, an early riser, hardy, active, and simple in his tastes.

Feeling himself unfit for any of the learned professions, he turned his attention to commerce. People were beginning to look towards our antipodes as the source of fortune for adventurous spirits, and to associate Botany Bay with the wool trade, as well as with the exportation of our criminal classes. Sir

Luke Cadbury made up his mind that Sydney was the place for him, and wool his way to fortune. He let off every rood of the land, except his mother's flower-garden, for agricultural purposes; shut up the good old house, with its insignia of death hanging on the wall above the hall door; put the property into the hands of the family lawyer and land agent, and left Cadbury within three weeks of his father's funeral.

'If I am ever rich enough to pay off the mortgages, I shall do it,' said Sir Luke to his solicitor. 'I think my father reserved power to liquidate by instalments?'

'In all cases,' replied Mr. Dragmore, the lawyer, with a smile, for it seemed to him that no event in the history of the future could be farther off than the redemption of the Cadbury mortgages.

Young Sir Luke went away, and had not been in Australia three years before he began to send home money. Year by year from that time forward the Cadbury mortgages underwent reduction, until in something over twenty years the estate was free. John Dragmore, the family solicitor, went down to his grave wondering.

'That a son of old Sir Luke should have paid forty thousand pounds to the mortgagees, and twenty shillings in the pound to all his father's creditors!' he exclaimed on numerous occasions. 'To be sure, his mother was a Scotchwoman. That's the only way of accounting for it. It isn't in the Cadbury blood.'

Mr. Dragmore had been in his grave three-and-twenty years, and it was just forty-five years since young Sir Luke left Cadbury to make his fortune in wool. In all those years he had never returned to England. The fascination of wool, or of making money rapidly by that commodity, had kept him on the other side of the world. He had married early in life, and had lost his wife soon after marriage. That tie had never been renewed by him. He was a childless widower, and was supposed to be worth anything between a plum and a million. He was, therefore, even in the distance, an object of considerable interest to the Cadbury people, who passed the old Hall daily when they took their walks abroad, and saw the old mansion day after day in exactly the same condition, shutters closed, grass growing

on the threshold of the great iron gates, Farmer Mangle's cattle grazing in front of the Doric door. A tree or two had been blown down in the park, and the house had fallen into decay, but no other change had come over the old Hall; though Cadbury had expanded from a pastoral village into a smart little town, with plate-glass windows to its shops, and side streets of brand-new villas leading to nowhere.

Most of all was the great Australian wool merchant an object of interest to his next of kin. These were Mr. Grynde and his family at the Hollies, one of the neatest, most bandboxical places in the outskirts of Cadbury; and that reprobate young man, Waller Carlyon, who had very nearly brought his widowed mother's gray hairs in sorrow to the grave, by failing to pass his preliminary examination at the University of Oxford, or, in his own phraseology, being ploughed for smalls. He was not a brainless young man by any means, but was passionately fond of boating, and had given his attention to the geography of the Isis instead of the Scamander.

Samuel Grynde of the Hollies and Waller Carlyon stood in different degrees of relationship to Sir Luke

Cadbury, Waller's being a very remote kindred of the third or fourth cousin order, while Samuel was first cousin to the reigning baronet, and considered himself heir-presumptive to the estate.

Samuel's father, a person of somewhat plebeian extraction, but distinguished for his success in the legal profession, had married old Sir Luke's sister, and Samuel was the fruit of that union. His father had left him twelve hundred a year, upon which income he had married and brought up a large family, with credit to himself and the neighbourhood he honoured by his residence. He had adopted no profession, except that of vestryman and general busybody. He had a finger in every pie that was baked in Cadbury. Whatever project for the benefit of Cadbury was set on foot, Samuel Grynde was at the bottom of it. There was not five hundred feet of drain-pipe put in the ground at Cadbury without Mr. Grynde making a speech about it. He was great upon sewage; he was a terror to the authorities of the Springfield, Bilbury, and Cadbury Union, always wanting to know about that odd half-pound of butter, and who eat those mutton chops, and

whether the guardians' Worcester sauce and Bass's bitter were charged upon the parish. The luncheons of the guardians were always a stumbling-block to Mr. Grynde, and he would raise a whirlwind in the vestry by alluding to those mutton chops.

Mr. Grynde was spare in person, a man who eat very little himself, and objected to large appetites in other people. The young Gryndes had rather a hard time of it while they were growing and hungry—their father denouncing a fourth slice of bread-and-butter as an indulgence of the lusts of the flesh. Mr. Grynde had a long nose, sharp as a bird's beak, a long neck, and a habit of lifting up his coat tails as he hovered on the edge of a sewer, or bent over a drain-pipe, which suggested a resemblance to a stork on the edge of a marshy pool.

Mr. Grynde's private opinion was that he had made Cadbury; that it was through his fostering and paternal care the village had spread itself out into a town; that the plate-glass windows, the loop line from Springfield Junction, and the new railway hotel, all emanated more or less from him. He had talked about these institutions in the vestry until he believed

in them as verily his own. Yet he was not a popular man in Cadbury. The blues had nicknamed him Sandy Stork, on account of the reddish tinge of his whiskers, and that propensity for hovering on the edge of open drains. The yellows called him 'Those mutton chops,' in memory of those field-days in the vestry on which he had thumped the table, and perorated like a second Chatham—Pitt the younger was too mild for him—on the malfeasance and misappropriation involved in the guardians' luncheons.

To Waller Carlyon Mr. Grynde objected on so many grounds that his objections were hydra-headed, and if you had subjugated one, another would have cropped up in its place. He objected to Waller as a ne'er-to-do-well, who had squandered his money at Oxford, as an impudent pretender to Sir Luke's relationship, and above all as an admirer of Mr. Grynde's third daughter, Lucy, a giddy light-hearted damsel, whom all Mr. Grynde's paternal teaching had failed to improve into that pattern of maidenhood for which Mr. Grynde had in a manner taken out a patent.

The two elder girls were perfect specimens of Mr.

Grynde's patent young woman. They played and sang duets like a pair of automaton performers, and were never out of time by so much as a demi-semiquaver. They read Racine, and nothing but Racine, in the French language. They had ploughed through Schiller's 'Thirty Years' War,' in the original, of course, and found it interesting. They played croquet at proper seasons, which meant on a Wednesday afternoon, which was their At Home day, when they wore their clean muslin frocks, and received the *élite* of Cadbury.

Lucy was a wild weed among these flowers. In her nursery and schoolroom days her pinafores had always been torn, one tail of chestnut hair *minus* its ribbon, her French and German verbs all at sea in the subjunctive mood, and her bootlaces broken. She had always been what Mr. Grynde called 'an outrage' on his sense of decency. Now that she was grown into bright, impulsive, blushing, alternate smiling and weeping girlhood, she was still an outrage. There was always something wrong—a bit of braid torn off the bottom of her dress, a new hat spoiled untimely by a shower, or she was late for

prayers, or she was out when she ought to be at home, or she liked people whom Mr. Grynde disliked, or squandered her allowance on unworthy objects of charity. And now she had filled the measure of her iniquities by falling in love with her father's natural enemy, Waller Carlyon, whose widowed mother had, possibly with a malice aforethought, taken a pretty Gothic cottage next door to Mr. Grynde's square bay-windowed villa.

The villa possessed a large garden of the modern order, sunk croquet lawn, raised banks, geraniums in square, geraniums in single file, like soldiers; no trees, except plums and peaches skewered against the new walls. The cottage had an old-fashioned garden and orchard, all in one, full of queer crooked old trees, deep soft grass, all hillocks and hollows, a wilderness of hazel and elder for a boundary between cottage garden and villa 'grounds.'

There was an old tumble-down fence dividing the wilderness from Mr. Grynde's kitchen-garden, which that gentleman would assuredly have replaced with a ten-foot wall had he not cherished hopes of getting that cottage and garden a bargain some day,

in which event he would have pulled down the cottage, and added the garden to his own domain.

Thus, in a laudable spirit of economy, he left the fence standing, and would not even lay out a sovereign on its repair.

'It's an eyesore, I admit,' he used to say, 'a blemish to grounds which I venture to think are otherwise perfect, but it would be folly to build a wall when I hope to enlarge in that direction by-and-by.'

This fence was at the bottom of all Lucy's troubles. She had torn her pinafores climbing it in the old nursery days, when the cottage was empty, and she and her brothers used to make raids into the orchard after half-ripened apples. It played the part of wall in the tragic story of Pyramus and Thisbe now. Waller and Lucy were cousins—cousins at any rate, however remote the cousinship—and they had been more or less acquainted all their lives. When Mrs. Carlyon came to live at the cottage that acquaintance expanded considerably. They began by wishing each other good morning across the broken old fence; they went on to ex-

change slips and cuttings; they developed from this into the interesting study of botany, and before they had got very deep into that science, they found their eyes wandering from calyxes and petals to each other's faces, losing themselves in a sweet entanglement; and a little later they confessed that they adored each other.

'Papa would never hear of it,' said Lucy, with a piteous face.

'Why not, love?'

'Oh, for ever so many reasons. He says you are wild.'

'Because I was weak enough to let myself be ploughed for smalls. That was boating, and not dissipation, my pet. I never was gated in my life, and I don't owe sixpence in Oxford. Besides which, I am working like a nigger at this present time.'

'Oh, Waller, when you waste whole afternoons talking to me!'

'Only necessary relaxation, dearest. I should very soon be in a lunatic asylum if I stuck to my books all day.'

Their fool's paradise had not lasted long before

Samuel Grynde got to know of those meetings by the broken-down fence, and that his daughter's heart had been handed across that dilapidated boundary, together with the botanical specimens.

He was calm in the greatness of his anger.

'This is an outrage I was not prepared for,' he remarked to his contrite and weeping child, 'although your plebeian manners and slovenly habits have made your life one continued affront to me. I beg that you will consider yourself a prisoner in the house, except when your elder sisters are good enough to allow you to accompany them on their constitutional walks.'

Lucy gave a shuddering sob. If there was one thing she detested more than another, it was these constitutional walks. Three miles out and three miles home on the level high road to Springfield, with no landscape save an arable flat, bounded by an occasional stunted hedgerow. Her own rambles were sweet to her—unmeasured wanderings in Cadbury Park, or in the woods beyond the park, with her small brothers, nutting, blackberrying, spoiling her clothes, and cultivating a complexion that rivalled

the roses and lilies in the old cottage garden. But these six miles by the milestones were an abomination to her.

All this happened during what Waller Carlyon called the long vac. It was the very end of the summer, and a glorious summer, the land overflowing with fertility, and the drainage of Cadbury not quite answering the expectations of its projectors. August was in its prime, and people had almost forgotten the sensation of a wet day.

'It's a very miserable summer,' complained Lucy, as she sat at her plain sewing—plain sewing was one of the accomplishments Samuel Grynde insisted on for his patent young woman—in the square, bare, sunny breakfast parlour at the Hollies. 'I wish it would rain torrents, or thunder, or lighten, or do anything instead of this perpetual broil, broil, broil.'

Waller Carlyon, cut off from that pleasant idlesse by the old fence, went harder than ever at his books, promising his mother that all should be well at the next examination; and the widow, who believed in him as a future Lord Chancellor, blessed him for his goodness and industry, and implored him

to do justice to his splendid talents, which must have been designed by Providence to raise him to a pinnacle.

'Well, mother, I'll do what I can to swarm up the pinnacle,' answered the youth, in his sanguine style, 'or, at any rate, to get a fellowship before I'm thirty, so that I may be a help and not a burden to you.'

'Ah, Waller,' sighed his mother, 'I'm not thinking of money. I want you to be distinguished. Who knows whether you mayn't be rich some day, independent of your own efforts. Sir Luke Cadbury——'

'Put Sir Luke and his fortune out of your mind, mother. Old Sandy Stork is a nearer relation than you or I; and, depend upon it, if ever Sir Luke comes back to Cadbury our next-door neighbour will wind round him like a serpent, lubricate him with soft sawder, and swallow him bodily, as a cobra swallows a rabbit.'

'Who knows?' said Mrs. Carlyon, with smiling significance.

She was an easy-tempered lady, and always made the best of the present, and hoped a great deal

from the future. The idea that Sir Luke Cadbury might leave some of his money to her son had been the foundation of many an air-built castle. Waller would never admit that such a thing was likely.

'I dare say Sir Luke is a fiery-tempered old savage, and that if he comes home I shall hate him,' he used to say.

It was useless to think of stopping indoors in such an August as this, so, when the garden ceased to be a paradise, Waller took Thucydides and his lexicon under his arm, and went into Cadbury Park. It was the loveliest place for a summer ramble. Neglect had beautified it. Instead of the well-kept orderly fairness of a prosperous gentleman's domain, it had the wild loveliness of untrodden woods. A painter would have revelled in such a wilderness. Oaks and beeches a thousand years old, bramble and fern that had flourished undisturbed for half a century, glimpses of a silvery trout stream that meandered in and out, and twined itself about the place as if it loved those shadowy deeps of foliage.

Here, on the margin of this silvern brook, Waller

used to sit for hours, trying to grasp the spirit of the great historian as well as the letter; he used to sit and pore over the page, till it seemed to him that all the troubles of the Peloponnesian War were upon his shoulders.

He was getting rather sleepy over his book one particularly sultry afternoon, when he was startled from his drowsiness by a strident voice near at hand—a voice that had an overbearing and singularly caddish tone, he thought, sadly out of harmony with those tranquil woods.

'Too much timber,' said the voice; 'we must lay about with us the axe here, Blagrove.'

Another voice, very mild this one, murmured acquiescence.

'And we must have the roof off, Blagrove, and rebuild the stables. I never saw such a ramshackle old barrack. By Jove, sir, I wonder how my father tolerated it. But, to be sure, he hadn't a sixpence of ready money to lay out, poor old beggar. *He* couldn't write his cheque for fifty thousand, and feel none the poorer for it, as some people we know could, eh, Blagrove?'

'By the beard of the thunderer,' ejaculated Waller, 'this must be Sir Luke.'

The voices were coming nearer to him, and the owners thereof now came in full view, on the opposite bank of the narrow stream.

The man with the big voice was portly and pompous. He had a rubicund nose, a keen gray eye, a coarse stubble of grey hair, and a fierce gray whisker. He carried his hat in his hand, and puffed and snorted a good deal, as if oppressed with the heat.

His companion was a small dark man, with an intelligent eye and a pleasant mouth—a mouth with a touch of good-humoured irony in its expression. He was about the same age as the stout man, his hair and beard iron-gray. He was rather shabbily dressed, and looked like a clerk, humble companion, or toady, Waller thought.

'Hi, you sir!' cried the big man. 'Do you know this place?'

'Pretty well,' answered Waller, still seated on the bank.

'Then you ought to know that you're trespassing. What's the use of people going to the expense of

putting up boards, telling you that trespassers will be prosecuted, if you go on trespassing all the same?'

'I've been in the habit of using this park for the last ten years, and have never been told I was a trespasser till to-day,' said Waller.

'Nonsense! Don't the boards tell you so as plain as a pikestaff, if you can read?'

'Farmer Gibbs never told me so, and, as he rents the land, he has the best right to object to me.'

'Come, I say, young man, don't you be contumacious. You are trespassing upon my land, sir—my land. Do you understand that? I come home here after forty years' absence, and the first object I encounter is a trespasser. Pleasant state of things, sir, that, for a man who has made his fortune by the sweat of his brow on the other side of the world. Pleasant to come home and find his patrimonial acres made free with by a trespasser.'

'Make your mind easy, Sir Luke. I shan't intrude again.'

'Oh, you know me, do you?'

'Only by repute, sir, though I have the honour to be a distant relation of yours.'

'Distant relation. Yes, I expect I shall have distant relations cropping up at every hand's turn. And pray who may you be?'

'My name is Waller Carlyon.'

'Oh,' said Sir Luke. He surveyed Waller deliberately from head to foot, and then turned to his humble friend. 'Blagrove, you've a better memory than I have, and you've heard me talk about my family times and often. What relation is Waller Carlyon to me?'

'Third cousin,' answered Blagrove. 'Your father's first cousin, Sybilla Cadbury, married Squire Carlyon of Denzil Place, and this young man is their grandson.'

'Oh,' said Sir Luke, 'that's uncommonly distant. I can hardly be expected to recognise that as a claim, can I, Blagrove? Now look here, Mr. Waller——'

But Waller had gathered up his books and was gone.

'Horrid old cad,' he said to himself as he went across the park. 'I dare say I've made an end of *my* chances in that direction; but I couldn't cringe

to such an old savage as that for the chance of inheriting a million.'

Cadbury was convulsed. Sir Luke's return was the grandest event that had happened since the opening of the loop line from Springfield. Cadbury was on the tiptoe of expectancy. What was Sir Luke going to do? Would he rebuild the old Hall? To whom would he leave his money? Would Mr. Grynde, who had made a boast of his cousinship, be received into the great man's favour? Cadbury awaited the answer to these queries, breathless with curiosity and wonder.

Cadbury's doubts upon two points were speedily set at rest. Sir Luke did not rebuild the old Hall; he only restored it to its original solidity and splendour. And Sir Luke took Samuel Grynde to his bosom.

Mr. Grynde, spare of figure, and without an ounce of superfluous flesh about him, seemed bodily to expand after Sir Luke's return. He had always walked the streets of Cadbury as if the place belonged to him; but he contrived to impart increased arrogance to his walk — a superlative dignity to his figure—after Sir Luke's return.

He was at Sir Luke's right hand throughout the restoration of the Hall, which occupied all the autumn, and was more than ever stork-like in his motions and attitudes. He dipped his beak into every drain, climbed ladders upon perpetual journeys of inspection, peered into every gutter, and was continually whitening his coat with lime. He knew a good deal about building, and contrived to make the lives of bricklayers and other mechanics a burden to them, and to worry the architect into a low fever.

'I can save you hundreds, Sir Luke, *hundreds*,' he used to say. 'I know these fellows and the tricks they are up to.—Hi, you sir, what is that timber you are putting in? Let me see. if you please. Do you call this free from sap? And those wall posts, are they stop chamfered, sir? Let there be no shirking here.'

This devotion was all the more creditable to Mr. Grynde as Sir Luke was by no means an agreeable person to serve. He was choleric, and in his choler made no distinction of persons. He would swear at his toady and dependant Jack Blagrove, and at Samuel Grynde, indifferently. He had an unpleasant

way of telling people that they were fools, idiots, ignoramuses. He sent his dear Samuel on messages. He rounded on his dear Samuel to the architect, and let that gentleman know Mr. Grynde's very low estimate of his professional skill. He was a glutton and a gourmand, and made himself odious at dinner-time by quarrelling with the goods the gods had provided, and swearing at his cook. He was perpetually bragging about his wonderful career, and railing at the worn-out county families, which, he asserted, were lapsing to decay, slipping from stagnant respectability into absolute ruin, for want of the trader's energy and the trader's success.

'Suppose I had stayed at home, sir, and played the fine gentleman, just because I had a handle to my name, and let the mortgagees foreclose? where would Cadbury Hall have been now, I should like to know?'

'Cadbury itself would be the poorer by one of the noblest examples ever offered to mankind,' exclaimed Mr. Grynde, feeling that his reply was at once appropriate and eloquent.

'Ah,' grunted Sir Luke, 'I wasn't afraid of trade

because I was born in the purple. I dropped the handle to my name, and went in for wool, sir, and wool brought me through. Bring up your children to trade, Grynde, if you want 'em to be great men. Where would your Peels and your Gladstones be if they hadn't got trade at the back of 'em? That's the backbone, sir!'

Mr. Grynde winced. With the pride of a man whose forefathers had been commercial, he aspired to make his sons professional, to see their names by and by adorned with Q.C., or supported by the prefix of Reverend. His sons, still in the hobbledehoy stage, were being ground into parsons and barristers, but had not yet got beyond a preliminary course of Æsop and Ovid.

'Trade is a fine thing,' he exclaimed gushingly. 'Trade is the quicksilver in the veins of society, which keeps all things moving. But, alas! I fear my poor boys lack that mental force needful to the trader. They have not the scope, the width, the breadth, the largeness of mind——'

Here Mr. Grynde waved his arms like a thrashing machine.

'Humph!' muttered Sir Luke, 'that means to say

you're going to make them respectable paupers in the learned professions. I'm sorry for 'em.—Blagrove, my camp-stool——'

'Mr. Blagrove, the camp-stool,' repeated Mr. Grynde in a tone just a little more arbitrary than that of the tyrant himself.

Poor John Blagrove had rather a bad time of it that autumn. His patron was hard upon him always, but Samuel Grynde was harder. He pointed every joke of Sir Luke's against his toady by the frankness of his hilarity. If Mr. Blagrove had been a butt before, he was twice a butt now. Samuel Grynde never spared him.

'There doesn't seem to be much sympathy between you and me, Mr. Grynde,' the humble companion said once in meek remonstrance.

'Candidly, my good friend, there is none,' answered Mr. Grynde; 'I hate parasites.'

'And yet we both belong to the same family,' said Blagrove. 'You're much the sturdier plant, I admit; but we hang on the same tree.'

'What, sir, you presume to compare me, Samuel Grynde of the Hollies, a man of independent property,

a man of illimitable influence in this parish, with your beggarly self?'

'I don't compare our persons or our social status, sir. I only say that our aims tend in one direction. You intend to be enriched by Sir Luke. I hope to be left a small competence by the same benefactor.'

'Oh, you do, do you, sir? You have the audacity to own that you anticipate a competence? A cool five thousand or so in the Three per Cents., I suppose, bringing you in something like two hundred a year?'

'I have served Sir Luke faithfully, and served him long.'

'And have been paid for your services, I'll warrant me. I am of Sir Luke's own flesh and blood, Mr. Blagrove; his first cousin, sir; couldn't be nearer unless I was his brother. What have you to say against that, sir?'

'Nothing,' answered Blagrve, with a touch of that manhood which was not quite extinct in him, 'except that Sir Luke might have had a more generous-minded cousin.'

The reparations and restorations at Cadbury Hall were completed just before Christmas, and a noble

mansion the old house looked in its prosperity. Shining oak panelling, rich but sombre Turkey and Persian carpets, good old furniture, renovated, but in no case modernized. Despite his ingrained snobbishness, Sir Luke had shown excellent taste in all details, most of all in resisting Mr. Grynde's advice, and suffering himself to be guided by his toady Blagrove, who had a wonderful appreciation of the beautiful and the harmonious.

Christmas was to be a grand time at the Hall, for Sir Luke had taken it into his head to gather all his relations round him at that festive period. He would have them all in the house, he declared, from Christmas Eve till Twelfth-night.

'I want them all about me,' he said; 'I want to know of what stuff they're made of. They're pretty sure to turn themselves inside out in a fortnight. Let 'em all come. There are rooms enough for the whole biling.'

'Whole biling!' echoed Samuel, admiringly. 'That's what I call our racy English humour.'

Now this Christmastide hospitality was all very

well, as regarded the Grynde tribe; but the worthy Samuel distinctly objected to Waller Carlyon and his mother—that weak-minded widow who insisted upon being alive and cheerful when her gray hairs ought to have been brought down in sorrow to the grave by her son's ill conduct.

Upon this point, however, Sir Luke was inflexible. 'Pig-headed,' Mr. Grynde called him inwardly.

'That Carlyon fellow is an insolent blackguard,' said the baronet; 'but I'll have him here all the same, and let him turn himself inside out.'

On this Mr. Grynde tried to make excuses for his daughter Lucy, whose peace of mind and ultimate destiny would be alike jeopardized by her being thrown into Waller Carlyon's society for a fortnight on end.

But here again Sir Luke's pig-headedness exhibited itself.

'If Lucy doesn't come, I won't have any of your brood,' replied the baronet, savagely.

So the brood came, and Lucy among them. Poor Lucy was not elated at the idea of spending a fortnight at the great house, where she would doubtless

outrage those proprieties with which Mr. Grynde surrounded and fenced himself in, as with a particularly spiky *chevaux de frise*. Many a wound had Lucy given herself against those spikes.

No one told her that Waller was to be at the Hall, and it was a tremendous surprise to her when that young gentleman appeared at the great door and handed her out of the fly, in which she arrived with her sisters, at about four o'clock in the afternoon of Christmas Eve, light snow flakes sprinkling them as they alighted. 'Capital Christmas weather!' as Waller remarked, cheerily. The two elder girls, Caroline and Amelia, gave him only a distant bow in return for his civility; but he contrived to get hold of Lucy's hand and keep it for ever so long, while the bags and portmanteau were being carried in, the young ladies having brought all their fine raiment for the subjugation of 'dear uncle Luke.'

'Come, Lucy,' cried Caroline severely, directly her attention was withdrawn from her bonnet-boxes; and Lucy was led off like a state prisoner to the bedchamber which Mr. Grynde had contrived to secure for her—a room inside her sister's apartment—a

funny old room, small, low, and with three closets in it, so that there was more closet door than wall-paper. There was a neat little brass bedstead, and a muslin-draped toilet table, with a lot of little Japanese boxes for pins, rings, and such small gear, and Lucy exclaimed that it was 'a duck of a room.'

'I wouldn't be so gushing if I were you, Lucy,' remarked Amelia; 'it's extremely vulgar. You know how papa admires repose of manner.'

Sir Luke received his young relations with a kind of bearish good-nature—loud, gruff and rough. The dinner was a profuse and splendid banquet, and poor little Lucy, who sat next her father and remote from Waller, felt that the whole thing was an ordeal. She would have been altogether miserable if it had not been for Mr. Blagrove, who sat on her left hand and talked to her a good deal, telling her about his Australian experiences in a very pleasant way. She thought him quite the nicest old gentleman she had ever met, and was absolutely enjoying herself, when her father's heavy boot came down savagely upon her poor little satin shoe.

'Oh!' she cried.

'What do you mean by encouraging that old sycophant?' whispered Mr. Grynde in Lucy's affrighted ear. 'Am I for ever to be outraged by your vulgar instincts?'

After this Lucy's answers grew faltering and embarrassed. She was too tender-hearted willingly to let Mr. Blagrove see that she had been reproved for talking to him; but there was a palpable change in her manner, and the old man soon lapsed into silence.

'What has Mr. Blagrove done, papa, that I mustn't be friendly with him?' Lucy asked later in the evening, when she found herself next her father for a minute.

'What has he done? Have you no sense? Are you utterly devoid of discrimination? Don't you understand that this old man is a sordid flatterer, who hopes by licking the dust under Sir Luke's feet to ingratiate himself into my cousin's favour, and succeed to some portion of—if not all—his money?'

'But don't you do the same, papa? I don't mean lick the dust; but don't you hope to succeed to Sir Luke's fortune?'

'Don't presume to address another word to me, girl,' exclaimed Mr. Grynde, beside himself. 'You're a born idiot, and I think you were created to annoy me. Look at your sisters.'

He pointed to those young ladies, who at this moment offered a back view to their admirers. They had just seated themselves at the piano to execute their grand duet, 'The Waking of the Lion.' There was quite a military precision in their attitudes—elbows, shoulders, chignons at exactly the same angles.

'Look at your sisters, and blush,' whispered Mr. Grynde to poor Lucy. 'Blush as you reflect how the advantages by which they have profited have been thrown away upon you.'

Lucy had a fine ear for music, but had never been able to overcome the mechanical difficulties of that art so as to excel in the performance of showy fantasias, and the only kind of music which impressed Mr. Grynde was music of the skyrocket school.

The lion growled—the lion bellowed—the lion stretched himself—shook himself—exploded into savage roars, as the Miss Gryndes scampered up and down the keys at a lightning pace, or threw all the

power of their elbows into a volley of prodigious chords, which exploded in a sudden and alarming manner like musical torpedoes. Samuel hovered stork-like over the new grand piano, and rubbed his hands complacently, glancing round the assembly occasionally, as much as to say, 'This is my work. *I* taught them—or paid for their tuition, which is much the same thing.'

Sir Luke walked up and down the drawing-room throughout that performance, looking rather like a newly awakened lion himself. When it was all over he wiped his perspiring forehead with his Mandarin yellow bandanna, and exclaimed,—

'What an infernal row!'

Mr. Grynde's jaw dropped as he stared aghast at his kinsman.

'Will somebody play, "The Last Rose of Summer," or "Wapping Old Stairs"?' cried the baronet. 'That's the sort of music I like.'

'Caroline! "Wapping Old Stairs" immediately!' said Mr. Grynde, smiling amiably.

'I am sorry to say I have not that melody amongst my music, papa,' replied his dutiful eldest.

'Amelia, then.'

'Nor I, papa.'

'Nonsense! what do you want with music to play a simple air like that?'

'We do not play by ear, papa,' replied Caroline and Amelia simultaneously, as if that incapacity were rather a virtue than a defect.

'Lucy does,' cried Andrew, the youngest boy. 'Lucy can play anything she has once heard.'

'Then let Lucy play as many good old tunes as she can remember,' commanded Sir Luke.

Lucy, blushing to the roots of her hair, took her seat at the piano. Her fingers faltered a little just at first, but very soon the delight of touching that deep-toned Broadwood overcame overy other feeling, and she breathed her pure young soul into the familiar old melodies. 'Wapping Old Stairs,' 'The Last Rose of Summer,' 'My lodging is on the cold ground,' 'Auld Lang Syne,' 'Robin Adair,' 'Love's Young Dream' followed, like the beads of a necklace, strung together with tender untaught modulations.

It was 'Love's Young Dream' with which the girl finished, and there was a young Oxonian in the corner

by the wide old hearth whose eyes were wet with tears.

When Lucy rose, trembling a little at the silence her melody had made, Sir Luke marched straight to the piano and gave her a sounding kiss.

'Thank you, my dear,' he said; 'that's what I call music.'

Caroline and Amelia were rather short in their tempers that night at hair-brushing time, and Lucy was glad to have her funny little cupboardy room all to herself.

Christmas Day was very much like Christmas Eve, except that everybody went to church in the morning, and that the afternoon was devoted to a general exploration of the house. The walk to and from church, and the perambulation of the spacious old house, with its various corridors and darksome lobbies, gave Waller and Lucy several opportunities for a *tête-à-tête*, in spite of the Miss Gryndes' vigilance.

'Now,' exclaimed the stentorian voice of Sir Luke at dessert, 'I want you young people to have an old-fashioned Christmas evening—blindman's buff,

forfeits, puss-in-the-corner, acted charades, kissing under the mistletoe, and lots of it.'

'Vulgar old barbarian,' said Samuel Grynde inwardly; but in his outward and audible voice he cried, 'Dear Sir Luke, how your expansive nature delights in the pleasure of your youthful guests!'

'I should like to see some of 'em rather more youthful,' replied Sir Luke; 'those sons of yours look as if they were cased in whalebone from top to toe. I never saw such young prigs.'

'They have been carefully educated, I admit,' murmured Mr. Grynde.

'Carefully educated, sir! They've been drilled into anatomies!' cried Sir Luke. 'I should like to see them unbend, if it's in 'em to do it.'

Anxious to gratify his wealthy cousin, Mr. Grynde got near his sons, one by one, as the evening progressed, and whispered into their ears,—

'Be lively, sir, can't you? jump, jig, be boy-like, vivacious. Give loose to your animal spirits, boy.'

But the animal spirit of Mr. Grynde's sons had been flat-ironed out of them, or was at best a very tame animal. They went about the old oak-panelled

hall on tiptoe in the game of blindman's buff, grinning with a stereotyped grin, and looking as dapper and as *blasé* as Government clerks at a second-rate evening party.

Lucy—that perpetual offender against propriety—was the sole member of the Grynde family whose liveliness had not been brayed out of her in the paternal mortar. She skipped, she danced, she gave loose to girlhood's long pent-up mirth; she was always catching Waller Carlyon, or being caught by him. It was dreadful to see her going on so, her sisters remarked, with long faces.

But their remonstrances would have been useless, for Lucy was the heroine of the evening. Sir Luke took her under his wing, praised her pretty face, her flowing hair, her light step, her silver laugh, her sweet touch on the piano, by-and-by, when they had magic music, and Lucy played for them, interweaving a new garland of old melodies, from 'Hope told a flattering tale' to 'Cherry Ripe.' Yet this girl, out of very perversity, seemed to take more interest in that old toady John Blagrove's conversation than in Sir Luke's outspoken compliments. Mr. Blagrove sat by

the piano, and she talked to him softly while she played. He was very fond of music, he told her; and she felt that it was a real affection, and that the good old melodies went straight from her heart to his. It was quite the happiest evening Lucy had ever spent in her life, so different from Christmas evenings at the Hollies, which had been respectable and ceremonial occasions, enlivened with sacred music, and a solemn rubber for the elders. The old hall was only lighted by the great roaring yule log, which left shadowy corners unilluminated; and somehow, after the music, Waller and Lucy were always getting into these shadowy corners, and that dear old Mr. Blagrove made it his business to keep off intruders from these dusky retreats. He had taken the lovers under his protection, though they hardly knew it as yet.

Poor Waller was very far gone that evening, and felt it his bounden duty to make another appeal to Mr. Grynde next morning. That gentleman referred him to Sir Luke.

'You are apprised of *my* sentiments upon this subject, Mr. Carlyon,' he said. 'They are not likely

to undergo modification; but Sir Luke is my first cousin, the next best thing to being my brother, and he has in a manner taken my humble destiny and that of my children under his wing. If Sir Luke considers you a fitting match for my daughter Lucy, I withdraw my objections, and lay down my personal opinion as a sacrifice to that superior mind.'

'Sir Luke is in the library,' said Waller; 'will you say as much to him, and without delay?'

Mr. Grynde assented, and they went together to the library, where Sir Luke was lounging luxuriously in an arm-chair before the fire, reading yesterday's *Times*, while his humble companion, John Blagrove, wrote letters at a table by the window. A hardy man, Mr. Blagrove, with no self-indulgent habits.

'May I ask for a few words with you in private, Sir Luke?' said Waller.

'Talk away, sir, we are as much in private as we need be,' answered the baronet, curtly; 'Blagrove doesn't count.'

Waller urged his pretensions to Lucy's hand; he spoke of their mutual attachment, his hopes for the future—spoke with manliness and modesty.

Sir Luke flew in a passion.

'What, sir,' he cried, 'you come into my house only to seduce my favourite cousin's affections! You make love to her under my nose in a sneaking underhand way!'

'No, Sir Luke; Lucy and I came to an understanding last summer, and Mr. Grynde knew all about it.'

'Knew and disapproved, sir—disapproved, as you are aware, Mr. Carlyon; but I was willing to submit myself to Sir Luke—I was willing to be overruled by his superior judgment.'

'No fear of my overruling you, sir!' exclaimed Sir Luke. 'Marry my cousin to a jackanapes, who thinks he is going to set up housekeeping on a little Greek and Latin, and sponge upon me for the rest.'

This was unbearable. Waller lost his temper, and answered Sir Luke roundly. The baronet blustered and swore, and it ended in Waller going to his mother to tell her to pack her trunk, while he went down to the 'White Lion' to order a fly.

Mrs. Carlyon shed tears, and bewailed her adverse fate. 'After our spending such a happy evening and

all,' she lamented. 'I am sure I thought you had made such a favourable impression on Sir Luke.'

'His hide is too thick to be impressed, mother, except by a sledge-hammer. Silly old lady, you're crying over your best cap and taking the starch out. Don't be downhearted, mother. You know I never counted on the old man's favour.'

'Perhaps not, Waller,' answered the widow piteously, 'but I did.'

Waller got the fly and went off in sullen state with his mother, feeing the servants handsomely, but taking leave of no one. The news of his departure got about very soon, however, and Lucy came down to luncheon with red eyelids and without any appetite.

Her father demanded a private interview with her that afternoon, and called upon her solemnly to renounce that Oxonian reprobate Waller Carlyon. She was to pledge herself there and then to hold no further communication with him, never to speak to him, look at him, or even think of him again. Goaded thus, poor Lucy plucked up a spirit. Perhaps it was the high living at Cadbury Hall which made her so bold.

'No, papa,' she said, with gentle firmness. 'This is a question that concerns all my future life, and I cannot give way until I have reason to think myself wrong. My youth has not been particularly happy since poor mamma died. You and I have not seemed to understand each other very well; and I cannot renounce the hope of happiness all at once, because you tell me to do so.'

Samuel Grynde broke out furiously at this defiance. The waking of the lion was nothing to him; he quoted King Lear, and declared that such ingratitude as this was sharper than a serpent's tooth; and then he ordered Lucy off to her room, there to remain in durance till the end of the visit. Her sisters would take care of her, Mr. Grynde added, significantly.

This seemed an arbitrary proceeding on a father's part; but the fact is, Mr. Grynde was beginning to feel just a little jealous of his youngest daughter. Sir Luke had bestowed a degree of notice upon Lucy which, although flattering to Samuel Grynde's pride as a parent, was alarming to his self-interest as a legatee. Money left to Lucy, for her separate

use and maintenance, would be almost as much alienated from Lucy's father as if left to a stranger. She was just of age too; there would be no need of guardianship or trusteeship. If Sir Luke were to die to-morrow, she would pass at once into possession of any fortune he might leave her, and would doubtless bestow it on that reprobate Waller Carlyon. Sir Luke was pig-headed, self-willed, and illogical enough to be capable of leaving his entire fortune to Lucy if it pleased his fancy to do so.

'He hasn't the faintest sense of justice,' Mr. Grynde told himself; 'he must be ruled by a stronger mind than his own, and that pert chit of mine must be kept out of his way.'

So Lucy was relegated to the little cupboardy room inside the spacious bedchamber occupied by her sisters, and Sir Luke was told that she was suffering from acute neuralgia.

It was curious what a blank was made in the circle that evening by the absence of Waller and Lucy. All the Christmastide mirth was gone. Caroline and Amelia played their finest pieces, and sang the last fashionable Italian songs about nothing particular,

but gloom hung over the assembly as a curtain. Sir Luke fell asleep in his big chair by the fire; John Blagrove stole out of the room; the four Grynde boys played whist with the air of middle-aged fogies at the Cavendish Club; Mr. Grynde felt that things were going badly.

Lucy cried herself to sleep before it was dark, and woke to find the cold winter moon shining upon her white bed; a very awful-looking moon it seemed to her in the stillness of her chamber. She was a long way from all the sitting-rooms, quite at the end of a corridor, and she felt as if she were an inmate of some lonely tower in a great feudal castle. She began to be rather hungry too. One of the maids had brought a tray with chicken and other daintinesses at dinner-time, but Lucy had been too fast asleep just then to hear the knock at the door.

She struck a match and lighted the wax candles on the dressing-table, which made things a little better, but hunger still prevailed. She had been too nervous to eat anything at breakfast that morning, knowing that Waller was going to speak to her

father, and now it was ten o'clock, and she had been fasting all day.

'Oh dear,' said Lucy, 'how I should like a biscuit, a common hard biscuit even!'

She had hardly breathed this desire when she heard a curious sound in one of the cupboards.

'Goodness!' she screamed, 'it is a rat. I never can stay in this room if there are rats;' and she jumped on the bed to escape the horrid intruder.

Happily this was no rat, for a voice in the cupboard said gently, 'May I come in for a few minutes, Miss Lucy?'

It was poor trodden-upon Mr. Blagrove.

'Oh yes,' cried Lucy, 'please come in. I thought you were a rat.'

A key turned in a lock, and the cupboard door opened to admit Mr. Blagrove.

'You haven't been in that cupboard all day?' asked Lucy.

'No, my dear. This cupboard has two doors, as you may see if you look inside, the inner one opening on the servants' staircase at the east end of the

house. You may often find such closets in old houses. I don't think your papa knows of this.'

'I'm sure he doesn't,' said Lucy.

'Well, my poor child, how's the neuralgia?'

'Whose neuralgia?' asked Lucy; 'I never had neuralgia in my life.'

'Indeed! Then why are you up here?'

Lucy told him her troubles, artlessly as a child.

'Ah, I thought how the land lay. And so you two children are very fond of each other?'

'We adore each other.'

'And you think Waller would make you a good husband?'

'How could he be anything else? He is so good, so clever, such an affectionate son, so honourable, so industrious.'

'What a string of virtues! Well, my dear, without being quite so enthusiastic as you, I really believe he is a good honest-hearted young fellow. I only wish I could help you.'

'I wish you could,' said Lucy. 'I took to you from the very first, Mr. Blagrove; you made me feel more at my ease somehow, and when I saw how

rude the others were to you—except Waller and his mother, of course—I liked you all the more. I thought you were an outrage, like me.'

'An outrage?' inquired Mr. Blagrove.

'Yes. Papa always says I am an outrage against his sense of propriety.'

'How old are you, Lucy?'

'Twenty-one last November.'

'And you hardly look nineteen. And how old is Mr. Carlyon?'

'Twenty-one last May.'

'Humph,' muttered John Blagrove. 'If he were to elope with you it wouldn't be abduction. Poor little girl! I'm sorry I'm such a useless, dependent creature. Is there any small way now in which I could be of service?'

'Oh yes,' cried Lucy, eagerly; 'if you'd be so very kind as to get me something to eat; I'm positively famishing.'

'Famishing! Why, didn't you eat that wing of a chicken I sent you, with a mince pie to follow?'

'No, indeed; no one has brought me anything.'

John Blagrove opened Lucy's door, and looked

outside. There was the tray just as the maid had left it, on a table in the next room—a silver cover over the plate of chicken, which was flanked by a pint of champagne, the cork drawn, and the wine rather flat by this time.

Lucy was delighted to find she had not been forgotten.

'You dear, good soul,' she exclaimed, 'how sweet of you to think of me when I was in disgrace!'

'Neuralgia,' said Mr. Blagrove.

'No, sir, disobedience; and you must have known it.'

John Blagrove put the tray on a little table by the fire, which he had brightened up into a blaze. He and Lucy sat opposite each other, and hobnobbed with the champagne and shared the mince pie. It was quite a merry little *tête-à-tête* supper. Mr. Blagrove had locked the door, to make sure against interruption.

'Now, Lucy,' he said, 'I am not going to have you shut up in this room much longer. If your father doesn't let you out in the course of to-morrow I shall let you out the morning after. Let me see,

this is Thursday. Put on your best frock and your prettiest bonnet at nine o'clock on Saturday morning, while they all are at breakfast downstairs, and hold yourself in readiness to take a walk with me.'

'But what will papa say? He will never forgive me.'

'Nonsense, child! I think I know how to manage Mr. Grynde, with Sir Luke at my back. I can do anything with Sir Luke, you know.'

'Can you?' asked Lucy, wonderingly. 'I shouldn't have thought it; he seems to snub you so.'

'Only manner, my dear. But I must be off, or we shall have your sisters here, and then you'll get into trouble.'

So Mr. Blagrove gave Lucy a paternal kiss on her pretty white forehead, and let himself out by that mysterious old cupboard in which she had suspected rats.

The next day seemed very long to Lucy, though it was one of the shortest in the year. Her sisters had supplied her with a strip of embroidery to be worked, and a very dull book, but neither work nor

book could beguile her thoughts from the one subject of wonder that occupied her mind. What did Mr. Blagrove intend by such an audacious step as he had talked about last night? and how would he succeed in pacifying her father? Her meals were brought her quite regularly to-day, but wonder had taken away her appetite.

She obeyed her old friend implicitly, however, next morning, and was arrayed in her pretty dove-coloured silk dress, her black velvet jacket, and brown straw bonnet lined with sky-blue, by the time the great breakfast-bell rang.

She was putting on her gloves—a new pair to match her dress—when John Blagrove knocked at the closet door.

'Come in,' cried she.

'Ready, I see,' said he, 'and looking your prettiest. What's the day of the month?'

'What a funny question!' said Lucy; 'why, the 28th of December, to be sure.'

'That's a date which you must remember all your life, little one,' said the old man. 'Come along.'

He took her hand, and led her down a darkish

and narrowish stair till they came to a stone lobby that opened into the stable-yard. Grooms were hissing ferociously at their horses, and coachmen were squirting water at carriage wheels, but no one noticed Lucy and her companion. They went from the stable-yard to the park, and across the park, in the clear winter morning. The grass was frosted, and glittered in the sunshine.

'I am glad the sun shines, Lucy, for your sake,' said Mr. Blagrove. This remark, following on that about the date, seemed so odd that Lucy began to fear her old friend was not quite right in his head. A dear, good, pleasant old gentleman, but a little childish at times, perhaps.

They walked on till they came to the park gates, where there was actually a carriage waiting for them, Sir Luke's family coach, and into this they got. It drove them to the door of the old parish church.

'Is it a saint's day?' asked Lucy.

Mr. Blagrove answered never a word, but drew her little hand through his arm, and led her into the church. Just then the organ began to play a lively

march of Mendelssohn's; and, gracious! here was Waller Carlyon coming down the aisle, with his mother on his arm, and Mrs. Carlyon had her best gown on, the lavender moire she wore at all the Cadbury parties.

'Now, Lucy, you are my little girl to-day, and you are going to be married,' said Mr. Blagrove.

'Oh!' cried Lucy, 'I couldn't possibly—I couldn't fly in papa's face like this. He'd never forgive me'

'Yes, my dear, he would. He'll forgive you when he knows that I've adopted you, and that I can twist Sir Luke round my finger.'

Waller offered Lucy his arm now, and somehow she took it without quite knowing what she was doing, and they went up to the altar.

The good old vicar came out of the vestry, and the marriage service began, Lucy trembling very much; but when it came to her turn for responding, she spoke out more boldly than could have been expected. That glad young soul of hers burst its bonds of discipline just then, and she forgot all about her father's anger.

After they had all signed their names in the

vestry, Mr. Blagrove asked permission to put a ring over the symbolic circlet which Waller had just placed on Lucy's finger, and he slipped on a diamond half-hoop, whose lustre made the spectators wink, so brilliant were the big white stones in the morning sunshine. Such a present could hardly have been expected from a poor dependent like Mr. Blagrove, and Lucy wondered more and more.

And now the organ burst out again with Mendelssohn—the 'Wedding March' this time—and to the sound of that pompous music they walked down the aisle, and to the door where Sir Luke's coach was waiting for them.

They all four got into the carriage and drove back to Cadbury Hall—yes, entered audaciously by the park gates, and drove boldly up to the great Doric door. Everybody had gone mad, Lucy thought: yet she trembled no longer: she was no longer afraid of her father's wrath. She sat by her husband's side, and felt that safety and protection were there.

'Where is Sir Luke?' asked Mr. Blagrove as they went in.

'In the library, sir, with Mr. Grynde.'

'Come this way, then,' said Sir Luke's humble follower; and Lucy, Waller, and Mrs. Carlyon accompanied him to the sombre old room, with its long narrow windows and high walls lined with brown-backed books.

Sir Luke sat in his big arm-chair. Mr. Grynde stood in his favourite attitude in front of the fire, his coat tails over his arms. He faced the door as Lucy and her companions entered.

'Merciful powers! what does this mean?' he cried. 'Lucy, I thought I had desired you to keep your chamber.—Young man,' to Waller, 'I think that Sir Luke and I made our views pretty clear to you the day before yesterday.'

'Happily for me, sir, I had a friend of another way of thinking,' answered Waller, with respectful boldness; 'and, with his aid, I have ventured to take the law into my own hands. Lucy is of age and her own mistress, and within the last half-hour she has become my wife. She need be not the less your dutiful daughter on that account.'

Lucy was on her knees at her father's feet.

'"Blow, blow, thou wintry wind,
Thou art not so unkind,"

as this kind of thing,' cried Mr. Grynde, in a paroxysm of indignation. 'Go away, you base, undutiful child. Go and be a pauper with the pauper you have chosen for your husband. I renounce you!'

'And I adopt her,' said Mr. Blagrove, taking the weeping girl to his breast. 'I have given her away this morning; but I mean to keep her all the days of my life, and I shall leave her and her husband master and mistress of Cadbury Hall.'

'*You!*' cried Samuel Grynde. 'What have you got to do with it?'

'Only this much,' answered the old man, quietly: 'I am Sir Luke Cadbury. When I came home from Australia after forty years' exile, it was suggested to me by my good friend and chief clerk here, John Blagrove,' pointing to the stout gentleman in the arm-chair, 'that, as a wealthy and childless man, I was likely to be the cause of much meanness and mercenary feeling in my next of kin, the object of a great deal of flattery and sycophancy, and that

I should hardly succeed in seeing my next of kin in their true colours, so thick would be the coat of varnish they would put on to dazzle and deceive me. Out of this suggestion grew the idea that I, Luke Cadbury, should assume the person of my clerk and dependant John Blagrove, making that personification a great deal more subservient and dependent than the real Jack Blagrove, who is a truculent scoundrel, by the way.'

Here the two old men laughed heartily. Lot's wife, after that unlucky backward look of hers, must have been an image of cheerfulness as compared with Samuel Grynde at this juncture, so abject was the despair depicted on that gentleman's countenance.

'So I came as the clerk, and Jack took the character of the baronet, and very well he has acted it, barring a little exaggeration. He has made himself as disagreeable as he could, in order to test the fortune-hunting mind, and I must say he has found that order of intellect very elastic. You have put up with a good deal from my friend, Mr. Grynde, and you have not been particularly civil to me. But

I hope you will forgive Jack Blagrove as heartily as I forgive you.'

'You are a set of —— impostors,' exploded Samuel; and he stalked out of the room and away from Cadbury Hall without another word, or so much as a look to the right or the left.

Sir Luke kept the rest of the family till Twelfth-night, with the exception of Waller and Lucy, who went off to Malvern in the baronet's carriage, and there were gay doings at the Hall. The news soon spread through Cadbury, and Samuel Grynde had a bad time of it while the story of Sir Luke's return was fresh in the minds of men, women, and children. The street boys laughed at him openly. That Christian-like spirit which was one of the ornaments of his character ultimately prevailed, however, and a month after Lucy's marriage he accepted an invitation to dine at the Hall.

'If I had been a fortune-hunter, I should have taken this trick of yours more keenly to heart,' he said to his cousin, in a tone of mild reproachfulness, 'but as I was utterly without ulterior views, I can

afford to laugh at the little comedy, now that my first sense of irritation at Lucy's disobedience is over.'

'Quite without ulterior views?' said Sir Luke, slily; 'you told me a different story one day when I was John Blagrove.'

'Sir, I addressed you then as John Blagrove, and ventured to reprove what I considered your presumption in that character. I may have displayed a mistaken zeal, but my independence of mind never wavered.'

'I am glad of that, Samuel,' said the baronet. 'I have not many years to live, and I should like to be friends with all my kith and kin, and to see them happy round me. When I am dead and gone it will not be found that I have dealt unjustly by any one.'

This, though somewhat vague, was comforting.

HER LAST APPEARANCE.

CHAPTER I.

HER TEMPTATION.

'He is a scoundrel,' said the gentleman.

'He is my husband,' answered the lady.

Not much in either sentence, yet both came from bursting hearts and lips passion-pale.

'Is that your answer, Barbara?'

'The only answer God and man will suffer me to give you.'

'And he is to break your heart, and squander your earnings on his low vices—keep you shut up in this shabby lodging, while all the town is raving about your beauty and your genius—and you are to have no redress, no escape?'

'Yes,' she answered, with a look that thrilled him,

'I shall escape him—in my coffin. My wrongs will have redress—at the day of judgment.'

'Barbara, he is killing you.'

'Don't you think that may be the greatest kindness he has ever shown me?'

The gentleman began to pace the room distractedly. The lady turned to the tall narrow glass over the chimney-piece, with a curious look, half mournful, half scornful.

She was contemplating the beauty which was said to have set the town raving.

What did that tarnished mirror show her? A small pale face, wan and wasted by studious nights and a heavy burden of care, dark shadows about dark eyes. But such eyes! They seemed, in this cold light of day, too black and large and brilliant for the small white face; but at night, in the lamplit theatre, with a patch of rouge under them, and the fire of genius burning in them, they were the most dazzling, soul-ensnaring eyes man had ever seen; or so said the cognoscenti, Horace Walpole among them; and Mrs. Barbara Stowell was the last fashion at Covent Garden Theatre.

It was only her second season on those famous boards, and her beauty and talent still wore the bloom of novelty. The town had never seen her by daylight. She never drove in the Ring, or appeared at a fashionable auction, or mystified her admirers at a masquerade in the Pantheon, or drank whey in St. James's Park—in a word, she went nowhere,—and the town had invented twenty stories to account for this secluded existence. Yet no one had guessed the truth, which was sadder than the most dismal fiction that had floated down the idle stream of London gossip. Barbara Stowell kept aloof from the world for three reasons,—first, because her husband was a tyrant and a ruffian, and left her without a sixpence; secondly, because her heart was broken; thirdly, because she was dying.

This last reason was only known to herself. No stethoscope had sounded that aching breast—no stately physician, with eye-glass and gold-headed cane, and chariot and footman, had been called in to testify in scientific language to the progress of the destroyer; but Barbara Stowell knew very well

that her days were numbered, and that her span of life was of the briefest.

She was not in the first freshness of her youth. Three years ago she had been a country parson's daughter, leading the peacefullest, happiest, obscurest life in a Hertfordshire village—when, as ill luck would have it, she came to London to visit an aunt who was in business there as a milliner, and at this lady's house met Jack Stowell, an actor of small parts at Covent Garden—a cold-hearted rascal with a fine person, a kind of surface cleverness which had a vast effect upon simple people, and ineffable conceit. He had the usual idea of the unsuccessful actor, that his manager was his only enemy, and that the town was languishing to see him play Romeo, and Douglas, and the whole string of youthful heroes. His subordinate position soured him; and he sought consolation from drink and play, and was about as profligate a specimen of his particular genus as could be found in the purlieus of Bow Street. But he knew how to make himself agreeable in society, and passed for a 'mighty pretty fellow.' He had the

art of being sentimental too on occasion, could cast up his eyes to heaven and affect a mind all aglow with honour and manly feeling.

Upon this whitened sepulchre Barbara wasted the freshness of her young life. He was caught by her somewhat singular beauty, which was rather that of an old Italian picture than of a rustic English-woman. Beauty so striking and peculiar would make its mark, he thought. With such a Juliet he could not fail as Romeo. He loved her as much as his staled and withered heart was capable of loving, and he foresaw his own advantage in marrying her. So, with a little persuasion, and a great many sweet speeches stolen from the British Drama, he broke down the barriers of duty, and wrung from the tearful, blushing girl a hasty consent to a Fleet marriage, which was solemnized before she had time to repent that weak moment of concession.

The milliner was angry, for she had believed Mr. Stowell her own admirer, and although too wise to think of him as a husband, wished to retain him as a suitor. The Hertfordshire parson was furious, and told his daughter she had taken the first stage to

everlasting destruction without his knowledge, and might go the rest of the way without his interference. She had a step-mother who was very well disposed to widen the breach, and she saw little hope of reconciliation with a father who had never erred on the side of fondness. So she began the world at twenty years of age, with Jack Stowell for her husband and only friend. In the first flush and glamour of a girlish and romantic love, it seemed to her sweet to have him only, to have all her world of love and hope bound up in this one volume.

This fond and foolish dream lasted less than a month. Before that moon which had shone a pale crescent in the summer sky of her wedding night had waxed and waned, Barbara knew that she was married to a drunkard and a gambler, a brute who was savage in his cups, a profligate who had lived amongst degraded women until he knew not what womanly purity meant, a wretch who existed only for self-gratification, and whose love for her had been little more than the fancy of an hour.

He lost no time in teaching her all he knew of his art. She had real genius, was fond of study,

and soon discovered that he knew very little. She had her own ideas about all those heroines of which he only knew the merest conventionalities and traditions. She sat late into the night studying, while he was drinking and punting in some low tavern. Her sorrows, her disappointments, her disgusts drove her to the study of the drama for consolation, and temporary forgetfulness. These heroines of tragedy, who were all miserable, seemed to sympathize with her own misery. She became passionately fond of her art before ever she had trodden the stage.

Jack Stowell took his wife to Rich, and asked for an engagement. Had Barbara been an ordinary woman, the manager would have given her a subordinate place in his troupe, and a pittance of twenty shillings a week. But her exceptional beauty struck the managerial eye. He had half a dozen geniuses in his company, but their good looks were on the wane. This young face, these Italian eyes, might attract the town—and the town had been leaning a little towards the rival house lately.

'I'll tell you what, Stowell,' said the manager, 'I should like to give your wife a chance. But to take

any hold upon the public she must appear in a leading part. I couldn't trust her till she has learnt the A B C of her profession. She must try her wings in the provinces.'

They were standing at noontide on the great stage at Covent Garden. The house was almost in darkness, and the vast circle of boxes shrouded in linen wrappings had a ghostly look that chilled Barbara's soul. What a little creature she seemed to herself in that mighty arena! Could she ever stand there and pour out her soul in the sorrows of Juliet, or the Duchess of Malfi, or Isabella, as she had done so often before the looking-glass in her dingy lodging?

'Jack,' she said, as they were walking home—he had been unusually kind to her this morning,—'I can't tell you what an awful feeling that great, dark, cold theatre gave me. I felt as if I were standing in my tomb.'

'That shows what a little goose you are,' retorted Jack, contemptuously; 'do you think anybody is going to give you such a big tomb as that?'

Mrs. Stowell appeared at the Theatre Royal, Bath, and tried her wings, as the manager called it,

with marked success. There could be no doubt that she had the divine fire, a genius and bent so decided that her lack of experience went for nothing; and then she worked like a slave, and threw her soul, mind, heart—her whole being—into this new business of her life. She lived only to act. What else had she to live for, with a husband who came home tipsy three or four nights out of the seven, and whose infidelities were notorious?

She came to London the following winter, and took the town by storm. Her genius, her beauty, her youth, her purity, were on every tongue. She received almost as many letters as a prime minister in that first season of success; but it was found out in due time that she was inaccessible to flattery, and the fops and fribbles of her day ceased their persecutions.

Among so many who admired her, and so many who were eager to pursue, there was only one who discovered her need of pity and pitied her.

This was Sir Philip Hazlemere, a young man of fashion and fortune—neither fop nor fribble, but a man of cultivated mind and intense feeling.

He saw, admired, and, ere long, adored the new actress; but he did not approach her, as the others did, with fulsome letters which insulted her understanding, or costly gifts which offended her honour. He held himself aloof, and loved in silence—for the instinct of his heart told him that she was virtuous. But he was human, and his sense of honour could not altogether stifle hope. He found out where she lived, bought over the lodging-house keeper to his interest, and contrived to learn a great deal more than the well-informed world knew about Barbara Stowell.

He was told that her husband was a wretch, and ill-used her; that this brilliant beauty, who shone and sparkled by night like a star, was by daylight a wan and faded woman, haggard with sorrow and tears. If he had loved her before, when the history of her life was unknown to him, he loved her doubly now, and, taking hope from all that made her life hopeless, flung honour to the winds and determined to win her.

Could she be worse off, he asked himself, than she was now—the slave of a low-born profligate—the

darling of an idle, gaping crowd—scorned and neglected at home, where a woman should be paramount? He was rich and his own master—there was all the bright glad world before them. He would take her to Italy, and live and die there for her sake, content and happy in the blessing of her sweet companionship. He had never touched her hand, never spoken to her; but he had lived for the last six months only to see and hear her, and it seemed to him that he knew every thought of her mind, every impulse of her heart. Had he not seen those lovely eyes answer his fond looks sometimes, as he hung over the stage box, and the business of the scene brought her near him, with a tender intelligence that told him he was understood?

If John Stowell should petition for a divorce, so much the better, thought Philip. He could then make his beloved Lady Hazlemere, and let the world see the crowning glory of his life. He was so deeply in love that he thought it would be everlasting renown to have won Barbara. He would go down to posterity famous as the husband of the loveliest woman of his time; like that Duke of Devonshire,

of whom the world knows so little except that he had a beautiful duchess.

One day Sir Philip Hazlemere took courage—emboldened by some new tale of Jack Stowell's brutality, —and got himself introduced to the presence of his beloved. She was shocked at first, and very angry; but his deep respect melted her wrath, and for the first time in her life Barbara learnt how reverential, how humble, real love is. It was no bold seducer who had forced himself into her presence, but a man who pitied and honoured her, and who would have deemed it a small thing to shed his blood for her sake.

He was no stranger to her, though she had never heard his voice till to-day. She had seen him in the theatre—night after night, and had divined that it was some stronger feeling than love of the drama which held him riveted to the same spot, listening to the same play, however often it might be repeated in the shifting repertoire of those days.

She knew that he loved her, and that earnest look of his had touched her deeply. What was it now for her, who had never known a good man's love, to hear

him offer the devotion of a lifetime, and sue humbly for permission to carry her away from a life which was most abject misery!

Her heart thrilled as she heard him. Yes, this was true love—this was the glory and grace of life which she had missed. She could measure the greatness of her loss now that it was too late. She saw what pitiful tinsel she had mistaken for purest gold. But, though every impulse of her heart drew her to this devoted lover, honour spoke louder than feeling, and made her marble. On one only point she yielded to her lover's pleading. She did not refuse him permission to see her again. He might come sometimes, but it must be seldom, and the hour in which he should forget the respect due to her as a true and loyal wife would be the hour that parted them for ever.

'My life is so lonely!' she said, self-excusingly, after having accorded this permission; 'it will be a comfort to me to see you now and then for a brief half-hour, and to know that there is some one in this great busy world who pities and cares for me.'

She had one reason for granting Sir Philip's

prayer, which would have well-nigh broken his heart could he have guessed it. This was her inward conviction that her life was near its close. There was hardly time for temptation between the present hour and the grave. And every day seemed to carry her further from the things and thoughts of earth. Her husband's cruelties stung less keenly than of old; his own degradation, which had been the heaviest part of her burden, seemed further away from her, as if he and she lived in different worlds. Her stage triumphs, which had once intoxicated her, now seemed unreal as the pageant of a dream. Yes, the ties that bind this weak flesh to earthly joys and sufferings were gradually loosening. The fetters were slipping off this weary clay.

CHAPTER II.

HER AVENGER.

Sir Philip showed himself not undeserving Barbara's confidence. He came to the sordid London lodging —a caravansera which had housed wandering tribes of shabby-genteel adventurers for the last twenty years, and whose dingy panelling seemed to exhale an odour of poverty. He brought his idol hothouse flowers and fruits—the weekly papers—those thin little leaflets which amused our ancestors—a new book now and then—and the latest news of the town —that floating gossip of the clubs, which Walpole was writing to Sir Horace Mann. He came and sat beside her, as she worked at her tambour frame, and cheered her by a tenderness too reverent to alarm. In a word, he made her happy.

If she were slowly fading out of life, he did not

see the change, or guess that this fair flower was soon to wither. He saw her too frequently to perceive the gradual progress of decay. Her beauty was of an ethereal type, to which disease lent new charms.

One day he found her with an ugly bruise upon her forehead; she had tried to conceal it with the loose ringlets of her dark hair, but his quick eye saw the mark. When pressed hard by his solicitous questioning, she gave a somewhat lame account of the matter. She had been passing from the sitting-room to her bedchamber last night, when a gust of wind extinguished her candle, and she had fallen and wounded herself against the edge of the chest of drawers. She crimsoned and faltered as she tried to explain this accident.

'Barbara, you are deceiving me!' cried Sir Philip. 'It was a man's clenched fist left that mark. You shall not live with him another day.'

And then came impassioned pleading which shook her soul—fond offers of a sweet glad life in a foreign land—a divorce—a new marriage—honour—station.

'But dishonour first,' said Barbara. 'Can the path of shame ever lead to honour? No, Sir Philip, I will not do evil that good may come of it.'

No eloquence of her lover's could move her from this resolve. She was firm as the Bass Rock, he passionate as the waves that beat against it. He left her at last, burning with indignation against her tyrant.

'God keep and comfort you,' he cried at parting. 'I will not see you again till you are free.'

These words startled her, and she pondered them, full of alarm. Did he mean any threat against her husband? Ought she to warn Jack Stowell of his danger?

Sir Philip Hazlemere and John Stowell had never yet crossed each other's path. The surest place in which not to find the husband was his home. But now Sir Philip was seized with a sudden fancy for making Mr. Stowell's acquaintance—or at any rate for coming face to face with him in some of his favourite haunts. These were not difficult to discover. He played deep and he drank hard, and his chosen resort was a disreputable tavern in a narrow

court out of Long Acre, where play and drink were the order of the night, and many a friendly festivity had ended in a bloody brawl.

Here on a December midnight, when the pavements about Covent Garden were greasy with a thaw, and the link-boys were reaping their harvest in a thick brown fog, Sir Philip resorted directly the play was over, taking one Captain Montagu, a friend and confidant, with him. A useful man this Montagu, who knew the theatres and most of the actors—among them, Jack Stowell.

'The best of fellows,' he assured Sir Philip, 'capital company.'

'That may be,' replied Sir Philip, 'but he beats his wife, and I mean to beat him.'

'What, Phil, are you going to turn Don Quixote and fight with windmills?'

'Never mind my business,' answered Philip; 'yours is to bring me and this Stowell together.'

They found Mr. Stowell engaged at faro with his own particular friends in a private room—a small room at the back of the house, with a window opening on to the leads, which offered a handy exit if

the night's enjoyment turned to peril. The mohawks of that day were almost as clever as cats at climbing a steep roof or hanging on to a gutter.

Captain Montagu sent in his card to Mr. Stowell, asking permission to join him with a friend, a gentleman from the country. Jack knew that Montagu belonged to the hawk tribe, but scented a pigeon in the rural stranger, and received the pair with effusiveness. Sir Philip had disguised himself in a heavy fur-bordered coat and a flaxen periwig, but Mr. Stowell scanned him somewhat suspiciously notwithstanding. His constant attendance in the stage box had made his face very familiar to the Covent Garden actors, and it was only the fumes of brandy punch which prevented Stowell's recognition of him.

The play was fast and furious. Sir Philip, in his character of country squire, ordered punch with profuse liberality, and lost his money with a noisy recklessness, vowing that he would have his revenge before the night was out. Montagu watched him curiously, wondering what it all meant.

So the night wore on, Sir Philip showing unmis-

takable signs of intoxication, under which influence his uproariousness degenerated by-and-by into a maudlin stupidity. He went on losing money with a sleepy placidity that threw Jack Stowell off his guard, and tempted that adventurer into a free indulgence in certain manœuvres which under other circumstances he would have considered to the last degree dangerous.

What was his astonishment when the country squire suddenly sprang to his feet and flung half a tumbler of punch in his face!

'Gentlemen,' cried Stowell, wiping the liquor from his disconcerted countenance, 'the man is drunk, as you must perceive. I have been grossly insulted, but am too much a gentleman to take advantage of the situation. You had better get your friend away, Captain Montagu, while his legs can carry him, if they are still capable of that exertion. We have had enough play for to-night.'

'Cheat! swindler!' cried Sir Philip. 'I call my friend to witness that you have been playing with marked cards for the last hour. I saw you change the pack.'

'It's a lie!' roared Jack.

'No, it isn't,' said Montagu, 'I've had my eye on you.'

'By God! gentlemen, I'll have satisfaction for this,' cried Jack, drawing his sword a very little way out of its scabbard.

'You shall,' answered Sir Philip, 'and this instant. I shall be glad to see whether you are as good at defending your own cur's life as you are at beating your wife.'

'By heaven, I know you now!' cried Jack. 'You are the fellow that sits in the stage box night after night and hangs on my wife's looks.'

Sir Philip went to the door, locked it, and put the key in his pocket, then came back with his rapier drawn.

Montagu and the other men tried to prevent a fight, but Sir Philip was inexorably bent on settling all scores on the spot, and Stowell was savage in his cups and ready for anything. Preliminaries were hurried through—a table knocked over and a lot of glasses broken; but noise was a natural concomitant of pleasure in this tavern, and the riot awakened

no curiosity in the sleepy drawer waiting below.

A space was cleared, and the two men stood opposite each other, ghastly with passion; Sir Philip's assumed intoxication thrown off with his fur-bordered coat, John Stowell considerably the worse for liquor.

The actor was a skilled swordsman, but his first thrusts were too blindly savage to be effective. Sir Philip parried them easily, and stood looking at his antagonist with a scornful smile which goaded Stowell to madness.

'I'll wager my wife and you have got up this play between you,' he said. 'I ought to have known there was mischief on foot. She's too meek and pretty-spoken not to be a ——'

The word he meant to say never passed his lips, for a sudden thrust in tierce from Philip Hazlemere's sword pierced his left lung and silenced him for ever.

'When I saw the mark of your fist on your wife's forehead this morning, I swore to make her a widow to-night,' said Sir Philip, as the actor fell face downward on the sanded floor.

The tavern servants were knocking at the door presently. Jack Stowell's fall had startled even their equanimity. Tables and glasses might be smashed without remark—they only served to swell the reckoning,—but the fall of a human body invited attention. Captain Montagu opened the window, and hustled his friend out upon the slippery leads below it, and, after some peril to life and limb in the hurried descent, Sir Philip Hazlemere found himself in Long Acre, where the watchman was calling 'Past four o'clock, and a rainy morning.'

CHAPTER III.

HER FAREWELL SIGH.

Before next evening the town knew that Jack Stowell the actor had been killed in a tavern brawl. Captain Montagu had bribed Mr. Stowell's friends to keep a judicious silence. The man had been killed in fair fight, and no good could come of letting the police know the details of his end. So when the Bow Street magistrate came to hold his interrogatory, he could only extort a confused account of the fatal event. There had been a row at faro, and Stowell and another man, whose name nobody present knew, had drawn their swords and fought. Stowell had fallen, and the stranger has escaped by a window before the tavern people came to the rescue. The tavern people had seen the stranger enter the house, a man with flaxen hair,

and a dark green riding coat trimmed with gray fur, but they had not seen him leave. The magistrate drew the general conclusion that everybody had been drunk, and the examination concluded in a futile manner, which in these days would have offered a fine opening for indignation leaders in the daily papers, and letters signed 'Fiat Justitia,' or 'Peckham Rye;' but which at that easy-going period provoked nobody's notice, or served at most to provide Walpole with a paragraph for one of his immortal epistles.

Sir Philip called at Mrs. Stowell's, and was told that she was ill, and keeping her room. There was a change of pieces announced at Covent Garden, and the favourite was not to appear 'until to-morrow se'nnight, in consequence of a domestic affliction.'

Sir Philip sent his customary offerings of hot-house fruits and flowers to Mrs. Stowell's address, but a restraining delicacy made him keep aloof while the actor's corpse lay at his lodgings, and the young widow was still oppressed with the horror of her husband's death. She might suspect his hand, perhaps, in that untimely end. Would she pity and pardon

him, and understand that it was to redress her wrongs his sword had been drawn? Upon this point Sir Philip was hopeful. The future was full of fair promises. There was only a dreary interval of doubt and severance to be endured in the present.

The thought that Barbara was confined to her room by illness did not alarm him. It was natural that her husband's death should have agitated and overwhelmed her. The sense of her release from his tyranny would soon give her hope and comfort. In the meanwhile Sir Philip counted the hours that must pass before her reappearance.

The appointed night came, and the play announced for representation was Webster's 'Duchess of Malfi, concluding with the fourth Act:' 'the Duchess by Mrs. Stowell.' They were fond of tragedies in those days, the gloomier the better. Covent Garden was a spacious charnel-house for the exhibition of suicide and murder.

Sir Philip was in his box before the fiddlers began to play. The house was more than half empty, despite the favourite's reappearance after her tem-

porary retirement, despite the factitious interest attached to her as the widow of a man who had met his death under somewhat mysterious circumstances a week ago. There was dire weather out of doors—a dense brown fog. Some of the fog had crept in at the doors of Covent Garden Theatre, and hung like a pall over pit and boxes.

The fiddlers began the overture to Gluck's 'Orpheus and Eurydice.' Philip Hazlemere's heart beat loud and fast. He longed for the rising of the curtain with an over-mastering impatience. It was more than a week since he had seen Barbara Stowell; and what a potent change in both their destinies had befallen since their last meeting! He could look at her now with triumphant delight. No fatal barrier rose between them. He had no doubt of her love, or of her glad consent to his prayer. In a little while—just a decent interval for the satisfaction of the world—she would be his wife. The town would see her no more under these garish lights of the theatre. She would shine as a star still, but only in the calm heaven of home.

The brightness of the picture dispelled those

gloomy fancies which the half-empty theatre and its dark mantle of fog had engendered.

The curtain rose, and at last he saw her. The lovely eyes were more brilliant than ever, and blinded him to the hollowness of the wan cheek. There was a thrilling tragedy in her every look which seemed the very breath and fire of genius. The creature standing there, pouring out her story of suffering, was wronged, oppressed; the innocent, helpless victim of hard and bloody men. The strange story, the strange character, seemed natural as she interpreted it. Sir Philip listened with all his soul in his ears, as if he had never seen the gloomy play before—yet every line was familiar to him. The Duchess was one of Barbara's greatest creations.

He hung with rapt attention on every word, and devoured her pale loveliness with his eyes, yet was eager for the play to be over. He meant to lie in wait for her at the stage door, and accompany her home to her lodgings, and stay with her just long enough to speak of their happy future, and to win her promise to be his wife so soon as her weeds could be laid aside. He would respect even idle prejudice

for her sake, and wait for her while she went through the ceremony of mourning for the husband who had ill-used her.

The play dragged its slow length along to the awful fourth act, with its accumulated horrors—the wild masque of madmen, the tomb-maker, the bell-man, the dirge, the executioners with coffin and cords. Barbara looked pale and shadowy as a spirit, a creature already escaped from earthly bondage, for whom death could have no terrors. Thinly as the house was occupied, the curtain fell amidst a storm of applause. Sir Philip stood looking at the dark-green blankness, as if that dying look of hers had rooted him to the spot, while the audience hurried out of the theatre, uneasy as to the possibility of hackney coaches or protecting link-boys to guide them through the gloom.

He turned suddenly at the sound of a sigh close behind him—a faint and mournful sigh, which startled and chilled him.

Barbara was standing there, in the dress she had worn in that last scene—the shroud-like drapery which had so painfully reminded him of death.

She stretched out her hands to him with a sad, appealing gesture. He leaned eagerly forward, and tried to clasp them in his own, but she withdrew herself from him with a shiver, and stood, shadow-like, in the shadow of the doorway.

'Dearest!' he exclaimed, between surprise and delight, 'I was coming round to the stage door. I am most impatient to talk to you, to be assured of your love, now that you are free to make me the most blessed of men. My love, I have a world of sweet words to say to you. I may come, may I not? I may ride home with you in your coach?'

The lights went out suddenly while he was talking to her, breathless in his eagerness. She gave one more faint sigh, half pathetic, half tender, and left him. She had not blessed him with a word, but he took this gentle silence to mean consent.

He groped his way out of the dark theatre, and went round to the stage door. He did not present himself at that entrance, but waited discreetly on the opposite side of the narrow street, till Barbara's coach should be called. He had watched for her

thus, in a futile, aimless manner, on many a previous night, and was familiar with her habits.

There were a couple of hackney coaches waiting in the street under the curtain of fog. Presently a link-boy came hurriedly along with his flaring torch, followed by a breathless gentleman in a brown coat and wig of the same colour. The link-boy crossed the road, and the gentleman after him, and both vanished within the theatre.

Sir Philip wondered idly what the breathless gentleman's business could be.

He waited a long time, as it appeared to his impatience, and still there was no call for Mrs. Stowell's hackney coach. A group of actors came out and walked away on the opposite pavement, talking intently. The gentleman in brown came out again, and trotted off into the fog, still under guidance of the link-boy. The stage doorkeeper appeared on the threshold, looked up and down the street, and seemed about to extinguish his dim oil lamp and close his door for the night. Sir Philip Hazlemere ran across the street just in time to stop him.

'Why are you shutting up?' he asked; 'Mrs. Stowell has not left the theatre, has she?'

It seemed just possible that he had missed her in the fog.

'No, poor thing, she won't go out till to-morrow, and then she'll be carried out feet foremost.'

'Great God! what do you mean?'

'It's a sad ending for such a pretty creature, said the doorkeeper with a sigh, 'and it was that brute's ill usage was at the bottom of it. She's been sickening of a consumption for the last three months—we all of us knew it; and when she came in at this door to-night I said she looked fitter for her coffin than for the stage. And the curtain was no sooner down than she dropped all of a heap, with one narrow streak of dark blood oozing out of he lips and trickling down her white gown. She was gone before they could carry her to her dressing-room. They sent for Dr. Budd, of Henrietta Street, but it was too late; she didn't wait for the doctors to help her out of this world.'

Yes, at the moment when he had looked into that shadow face, seen those sad eyes looking into his with ineffable love and pity, Barbara's troubled soul had winged its flight skyward.

SIR HANBURY'S BEQUEST.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE HEXAM LIBRARY.

THE great northern metropolis, Loomborough, is one of the wealthiest provincial cities in the United Kingdom. Its public buildings are palatial. Its law courts, town-hall, exchange, clubhouses, warehouses, emporiums, boast an architectural magnificence which puts all other provincial cities to the blush. Its cathedral appears to have been neglected, and allowed to run to seed, as it were, for the last three hundred years; but that is a detail. Municipal authorities cannot do everything; and the dinginess of the cathedral brings out the freshness and sharpness of that grand example of the Perpendicular English order near at hand, the Law Courts.

Throughout the city there is an all-pervading air of wealth. One can see at a glance that a million of money can be as easily raised in Loomborough as a few paltry thousands elsewhere. You have only to convince Loomborough that the million is required for the maintenance of her glory, and there it is, in ready money, waiting for the architect's certificate.

Time was when Loomborough was a quiet country town, ringed in with green fields and humble rustic villages, a clear blue river winding through it, and the sweet summer air unpolluted by smoke. But within the last century Loomborough has swollen into a brick-and-mortar octopus, and with each of its hungry suckers has absorbed a village; till the names of those outlying hamlets alone are left, and now serve to distinguish some of the busiest, richest, dirtiest, smokiest, and most crowded districts of the vast city.

Of Loomborough as it was a hundred and thirty years ago—in the days of the famous Forty-five, for instance—it is difficult now-a-days to find a trace, save in some curious old print, exhibited, with proud humility, by a Loomborough printseller. Yet there

is just one little bit of the great city which has an old-world look even to-day, and suggests to one's fancy the quiet provincial town of the past; there is just one building which no sacrilegious hand has improved away from its original quaint beauty; a building which belongs to the age of Elizabeth, and is as unlike any modern edifice of the Tudor or Gothic school as it is possible for one thing to be unlike another.

This is Sir Hanbury Hexam's Library, a rich collection of black-letter books left to the city of Loomborough by a wealthy citizen of the Elizabethan age—with funds for the maintenance of the same, and power to add to their number—in accordance with certain rules made and provided, and a building to contain the same, and to be used as a public reading-room, open every day, except Sunday, free of charge, to the inhabitants of Loomborough. Sir Hanbury also established a college for the youth of the city, and endowed it with an estate amply sufficient for its maintenance. There, in a wide yard under the shadow of the dingy old cathedral, stand the two buildings: the school, tall and square, and

looking of later date than the library; the library, the quaintest, most curious old place that a student need wish to enter—a long low building, with all manner of narrow passages and queer little winding stairs; time-blackened oak panelling that might pass for ebony; ceilings that a man of middle height may touch with his hand; narrow recessed chambers, like loose boxes, where the books are stored in a severe gloom, appropriate rather to meditation than study—for it is but a dusky light that creeps in through the one narrow window which illumines each several recess. These small divisions are fenced off by carved oak doors, as delicately pierced as the tabernacle work above the stalls in a cathedral, which doors are kept religiously locked. Here, in their particular den, you may find the old Chroniclers, the Fathers of the Church, Homer and his translators, Rabelais in his various and numerous editions, Bacon,—all the mighty spirits of departed learning, each, like a hermit, in his particular cave or cell.

One of the labyrinthine passages leads to the public reading-room, where the student-world of Loomborough is to be seen on a winter's day, repre-

sented by three grim-looking men—two gaunt and elderly; one young, but singular of aspect, with elf-locks streaming over his greasy coat-collar. Taking the editions of Homer we have looked at upstairs at a rough guess we may safely say there are ten for each of the three students. One of the grim elders has surrounded himself with stacks of brown leather-covered tomes, as if he were anxious to get a good pennyworth out of Sir Hanbury's bequest. The other has drawn his ancient arm-chair close to the cavernous hearth, where a might sea-coal fire roars red and glorious in a vast iron grate. The young man muses over an open folio in a nook apart—a deep recess in which there is an old painted window, overhanging the stony yard, and colouring the gray December light.

The room has evidently been unaltered since Sir Hanbury devised it to his fellow-citizens. The low ceiling—the black and polished panelling—a clumsy oak table here and there—a carved oak cabinet of ponderous design—a buffet in the same style—a curious eight-day clock—all carry the evidence of their age upon them. Sir Hanbury Hexam himself,

an old man with a severe visage, pointed beard, and black velvet skull-cap, surveys the students from his portrait over the high oak mantelpiece, and seems to glower upon them in the ruddy firelight.

There is no pleasanter contrast imaginable than to pass from the brisk, busy, prosperous, money-getting modern city, seething and bubbling like a commercial witches' caldron a few yards away, to this silent dusky retreat, where one might fancy the lord of Verulam musing over the uses of deduction and hypothesis, or meditating the more practical question of how to preserve dead poultry by stuffing fowls with snow.

Into this sombre apartment on a certain December afternoon, about ten years ago, came a young man who seemed to have but little in common with the grim student at the table, or the gaunt idler hugging the fire—a young man with a bright handsome face, and a tall straight figure, clad in garments which had a certain un-English look, and were by no means too new. The dark blue overcoat looked as if it had been worn to the verge of shabbiness, and the carefully brushed hat betokened that care

which a man gives to his wardrobe who knows not when and how he may be able to replenish it. The three students glanced at the stranger as if they inwardly resented his intrusion. The stranger surveyed them critically, as if they had been three peripatetic folios dingily bound, like the books on the shelves in the long narrow chambers on the upper story, from which he had just descended, followed by one of the officials carrying half a dozen volumes.

The official deposited his load on one of the disengaged tables and departed. The stranger walked round the room, looked through the painted window —across which the snowflakes were drifting, whitening the stony yard beyond—contemplated Sir Hanbury's portrait, and warmed his hands at the ruddy blaze—the fire-worshipper pushing his chair back half an inch or so to make way for him, with a discontented look.

'Delicious old place!' said the stranger, turning to the fire-worshipper with a pleasant smile; 'charming retreat for the studious! Do you come here often, sir?'

'Every day, except Sundays, in winter,' growled the fire-worshipper.

'And our friend with the pile of books?' asked the stranger, with a backward glance at the table in a corner, where the second grim elder sat behind a rampart of dingy volumes.

'Every day, Sundays excepted, all the year round,' answered the fire-worshipper, gloomily. 'He's writing a book about the end of the world, with a critical analysis of all the prophets, from Daniel down to Dr. Cumming. Nobody will ever give him any money for it; nobody will ever thank him or think any better of him for having written it; no printer, unless he's a madman, will ever be found to print a page of it. But he seems to enjoy writing it,' added the fire-worshipper, with a jerk of his head in the direction of the student. 'He's been at it forty years.'

'And he?' asked the stranger, with a look towards the youthful muser, who was gently dozing over his open folio.

'Oh, he's a local poet. He comes here to read the classics. He sleeps a good deal, I observe, but I

dare say his ideas come to him that way. He contributes short poems to the newspapers gratis, and lives on his friends.'

The stranger sighed, and strolled away from the fire. He seated himself at the table where the librarian had placed his books, opened one of them, a Horace, and tried to read.

Unhappily there are conditions of the mind in which philosophic poetry loses its soothing power. This young man had his own troubles to think about, very real, very near—staring him in the face, jogging him by the elbow. Fate took the shape of the inexorable policeman, always urging him to move on. For him there was no tarrying at street corners: no shelter for him beneath the dark arches of life.

Presently he took a roll of paper from his pocket —the establishment found pen and ink—and began to write, stooping over the page, his pen dashing along with fiery speed, writing as a man writes who pours his heart out upon paper. It was a letter evidently, but what a letter!—six sheets of Bath post covered with that black bold caligraphy. When he had signed his name at the bottom of the last page

he looked at the scattered sheets dubiously, as if debating whether he should read their contents.

'No,' he muttered to himself. 'If I read them I should change my mind and tear them up.'

He folded the sheets hastily, thrust the clumsy budget into a big official-looking envelope, and addressed it to—

MISS HEXAM,
Hexam Park,
Near Loomborough.

It had been almost too dark for him to write the address in the dusky corner where he sat, but glancing towards the painted window, he saw that the deep recess which it lighted was vacant. The local poet had gone home to tea. The grim elders had departed. The room was empty.

'So much the better,' muttered the young man; 'I shall have a quiet half-hour before the place closes.'

He had a vague idea that the Hexam Library closed at six o'clock all the year round, and he had not troubled himself to verify that impression.

He went to the recess, took his Horace to the window, and began to pore over the large old-fashioned type. But at four o'clock on a December afternoon there was not light enough in Loomborough to illumine the biggest type. The distant street-lamps shone redly across the intervening gulf of darkness. The Hexam scholars were whooping in the stony yard. The young man looked at them through a bit of ruby glass—the real old ruby—in the painted window, yawned, sat down in the comfortable old oak chair, leaned his head on his hands, and abandoned himself to troublesome perplexities—till sleep stole gently upon his wearied brain, and closed the book of care.

CHAPTER II.

THE HEXAM ESTATE.

It was near the hour of closing, and that ancient student who devoted himself chiefly to the contemplation of the excellent sea-coal fire provided by the Hexam foundation paused in the dusky little vestibule for a chat with the chief librarian. There was no such thing as gas in the Hexam Library. A dim oil lamp illumined the low oak-panelled chamber where the librarian sat at his desk, with a large and ponderous tome before him, in which were recorded the names of the visitors and students of the library. There was a tradition that the autographs of Sir Kenelm Digby and John Evelyn were to be found in those faded old pages, and that a later leaf bore the honoured signature of Samuel Johnson. But the custodian was chary of displaying his treasures. He

loved the book, and dozed away many a quiet afternoon hour, with his gray head reposing affectionately upon the ancient binding.

'There's been a queer chap up yonder this afternoon,' said the fire-worshipper, 'very free and offhand in his manners. Who is he, and where does he come from?'

The librarian opened his book with a solemn visage, and pointed to the latest signature.

There, sprawling across the page, in careless youth's bold characters, appeared the stranger's name—

HANBURY HEXAM,

At the Old Bell Inn, Loomborough.

'What does that mean?' asked the fire-worshipper.

'I don't know. Either it's meant for a joke, or he must be the son of that old clergyman who ruined himself and his family by going to law about the Hexam property—Sir Joshua Hexam's estate, you know. There was a Chancery suit that lasted ever so many years.'

'I remember. But it's ten years since that was over and done with. I've almost forgotten the story.'

'I haven't. My connection with this place made it almost a personal matter, you see; and I studied the case in all its bearings. This Michael Hexam was a clergyman, with a good living and a comfortable little estate of his own—a farm near Bilshott. That's about twenty miles from Loomborough, you know. The farmhouse was very old, almost as old as this library. There was the date under the cornice of the porch, 1603, as large as life; and a fine old place it was. But one day, in a tremendous storm of wind, down comes a chimney-stack—such a chimney-stack as they don't build now-a-days—bricks enough in it to build a house with; and behind the chimney Michael Hexham finds a kind of cupboard or strong-room, containing a lot of old plate and an iron box of old family papers, not one of them later than William the Third's time. Well, these papers, according to Mr. Hexam's view of the case, proved his right to the Hexam estate.'

'How did he make that out?'

'Why, you must know that Sir Hugh Hexam,

our Sir Hanbury's son, who was created a baronet by James the First, died intestate, and without direct heirs, so that his estate passed to the next of kin. The next of kin who came forward to claim the property was a first cousin once removed, being the grandson of Sir Hanbury's younger brother. This young man was a second son, but he brought forward witnesses to prove his elder brother's death in foreign parts. So he got the property, and his descendants have held it from that day to this. Well, this Michael Hexam, the parson of Bilshott, had been taught by his father to consider himself the rightful heir to all the Hexam property in the possession of Sir Joshua—and of others, for the original estate had been divided and subdivided in the course of years—as well as to the baronetcy; but, till the falling of the chimney, there had been missing links in the documentary evidence, and he didn't see his way to putting forward any claim. The discovery of that box of papers altered the aspect of affairs. He submitted his case to a solicitor in Loomborough, who advised him to go in and win. He mortgaged his poor little estate to furnish the sinews of war, and

he filed a bill in Chancery against Sir Joshua Hexam and several other defendants. It was like the mouse going to war with the elephant.'

'I remember the case,' replied the fire-worshipper. 'It was always dragging its slow length through the newspapers. The man was smashed, of course.'

'Well, the man was, but his case wasn't. Some people might have called the issue success—but it killed the litigant. After the case had been before the court for years, off and on, the judge, one of our greatest men, pronounced upon the merits of the claim. Michael Hexam had clearly proved his legitimate descent from the elder brother of Mark Hexam, who succeeded Sir Hugh as next of kin. He had proved that the witnesses brought forward by this Mark Hexam to establish the fact of his elder brother's death were lying witnesses—that the elder brother was then alive, trading as a merchant in Spain, and the father of several sons; no link was missing in the chain of evidence, nothing was wanting. But after acknowledging the justice of the litigant's claim, the judge declared that to redistribute a vast estate after a lapse of ages would be

to commit a greater injustice than the wrong already done; and that, in his opinion, there was therefore no redress for that wrong, no appeal open to the claimant save to the generosity of the present possessors of the estate, of whom Sir Joshua Hexam was the largest and most distinguished. For the unhappy and mistaken gentleman who had put forward his claim the judge declared he had nothing but compassion; but to favour such claimants would be to introduce an element of confusion into the tenure of estates in the land, and to do harm to the multitude for the advantage of the individual. I know his speech pretty nearly by heart, I've read it so many times.'

'And did Michael Hexam appeal to Sir Joshua's generosity?' asked the other.

'No. He threw himself on the mercy of a greater tribunal than the Court of Chancery. He went straight home that dark December evening and cut his throat.'

'Did he leave any children behind him?'

'One—a son, a mere lad, called Hanbury. But he was abroad at the time, I believe—some said in a

Jesuit college—and nobody seemed to know where to find him. Sir Joshua Hexam wrote a letter to the papers professing his willingness to provide for this boy; but nothing ever came of the offer: the boy never came forward.'

'Curious boy!' exclaimed the fire-worshipper; 'I should come forward fast enough if any one offered to provide for me. And you suppose this is the very individual?' he said, laying his hand on the open page where that dashing signature showed darkly in the dim light.

'There's no other Hanbury Hexam that I know of,' answered the librarian. 'There are Hexams enough, but no Hanburys among them. The old name has died out.'

'Well, good-night,' said the fire-worshipper, departing.

'Good-night,' responded the custodian.

He closed his big volume, took his hat from its peg, and followed, locking various doors as he went, without a thought of the actual Hanbury, at that moment slumbering profoundly in the recess by the painted window.

CHAPTER III.

THE DREAM-PICTURE.

SILENCE perfect and profound descended upon the shadowy old chamber where the stranger slept upon his open book. The ruddy fire still burned cheerily, banked up too liberally to be exhausted in an hour or two. And in the silence and solitude young Hanbury Hexam dreamed a dream.

Time had reversed his glass, and that foolish dreamer fancied himself the son of an age long gone by.

It was in the reign of good Queen Bess, and all Loomborough was like the Hexam Library. The narrow streets were picturesque, with pointed gables and projecting upper stories, queer old mullioned windows, irregular pavements, open gutters through which the town sewage flowed merrily, like a rivulet. Loomborough was a small market town, with a cathedral that seemed ever so much too big for it,

and a margin of fields and wooded hills encircling it. At this Christmas season the fields and hills were white with snow, and the black twigs of the trees bore only icicles.

Young Hanbury Hexam walked through the narrow streets, clad in trunk hose, the worse for wear, and a scarlet doublet in the same condition, and a small gray woollen cloak which hardly shielded him from December's searching blast. He had come from beyond seas, where he had been trying to mend his fortunes with other adventurers, young, penniless, and desperate, like himself. He had failed, and now returned to his native city, feeling himself altogether an unnecessary unit in the sum of existence.

Altogether unnecessary? Well, no; perhaps there was one person who might be just a little sorry if he were beaten down in the conflict. Yet even she might have changed. Three weary years had come and gone since he had gazed into those true fond eyes, and heard those sweet lips speak their promise. What might not those years have done?

Young Hanbury crossed the market-place and approached the tall gloomy-looking cathedral,

There stood the low long pile, to the left of the holy edifice, just as it stands to-day—only instead of being a public library devoted to the worthy citizens of Loomborough, it was Sir Hanbury Hexam's private dwelling-house, with counting-house and warehouses adjoining; for Sir Hanbury was a great merchant, or a merchant who was counted great in those days. He had been knighted, as a reward for having made himself a handsome fortune, and was generally respected in the quiet old city of Loomborough. The young adventurer paused at the gate. There was a garden with a row of fine old elms where there is now only the wide stone-paved yard.

It is not a pleasant thing to beard the lion in his den, and Sir Hanbury had something leonine about him. His young kinsman paused, 'screwed his courage to the sticking place,' as a popular dramatist of that period would have put it, and went in under the leafless elms, across the crisp white snow.

There sat Sir Hanbury, poring over his ledger, in a little room near the door, now the custodian's vestibule. Young Hanbury looked at him through

the mullioned window. There he was, just as in the well-known portrait, with his pointed beard, stiff ruff, and black velvet skull-cap. Young Hanbury shivered in his slashed shoon, and then turned the handle of the door—how the old iron knocker rattled!—and went in, not courageous, but desperate.

Sir Hanbury looked from under his bristly iron-gray brows, surveying the returned wanderer as coolly as if he had been only half an hour absent.

'You did no good yonder, I see, sirrah!' growled the merchant, returning to his ledger.

'No, sir. I have encountered great dangers, and many hardships, and have done no good for myself whatever.'

'Humph! and you come back like a piece of false money; and now that your pride has had a lesson I'll warrant you'll be glad to accept my offer to provide for you—the offer I made when your foolish father cut his throat, after trying to rob me of my fortune.'

'Not a word against my father, sir. If he was a mistaken man, he was at least an honest one, and had right and justice on his side.'

'What are right and justice against centuries of possession?' exclaimed Sir Hanbury, contemptuously. 'Hearken, young Hanbury: when I offered you a stool in my counting-house—which meant a good deal more than you understood by it—and a seat at my chimney corner, you chose to refuse a fair offer, and to look upon me as the cause of your father's death. Yet, had your father been a wise man and brought his papers to me, instead of going to law, I would have given him more than the court awarded him; yes, sirrah, I would have freely given him a younger son's portion.'

'I come back to you, sir, to accept your protection, if you are still in the mind to give it,' said young Hanbury, in a manly and yet humble tone. 'There is no merit in my return—for I have tried my hardest to prosper without your help. Give me the lowest place in your counting-house, and let me labour for my wage. I ask no favour on the score of kindred.'

'And you shall have none,' said the old man, shutting his ledger with a bounce; 'but you shall have some reward for being an honest man and an

affectionate son, and for having tried to live without my help, and for the sake of one that loves you.' The young man's heart beat its fastest at this point. 'There are several reasons for you, sirrah.'

'One is more than enough, sir. 'Tis sweet for an exile to hear the word love.'

'Dorothy!' called the merchant, and lo! the door of an inner room opened—the dark old oaken door—and a girl entered who gave one look at the youth and then grew white as the snow in Sir Hanbury's garden. This was Dorothy Hexam, the old knight's only child; born in late wedlock, pure and pale as a winter rose.

'Dorothy, thy cousin has come home from beyond seas, and he is to live with us henceforward, and to work in the counting-house, and take my place by and by. Take him in, and give him a manchet and a tankard of October to stay his stomach till noon.'

The girl gave one happy cry, and drew near her kinsman like a startled bird. The young man grasped his patron's hand, stooped his handsome head to salute that iron fist with his lips, and then put his arm round Dorothy and led her through the

grim old doorway. They went out of the counting-house together into the homely parlour beyond, and sat down side by side in the deep-recessed window, and sealed the beginning of their new life with a betrothal kiss.

CHAPTER IV.

DOROTHEA.

THE sleeper awoke with a sense of chilness. The great cathedral bell was pealing the hour. He counted the strokes drowsily. Was the clock never going to leave off striking? nine—ten—eleven—twelve.

Midnight. He had fallen asleep in old Sir Hanbury's reading-room, and had been locked in. There was no help for it but to finish the night here. The room was dark; but through the painted window came the friendly gleam of the distant lamps.

'What a fool I must have been to fall asleep in such a place!' he said to himself; 'but a man who has just come off a long sea voyage may be excused for being a trifle sleepy.'

He groped his way to the cavernous old fire-

place, stumbling over a heavy chair as he went. He had a box of vestas in his pocket, and striking one of these, took a brief survey of the scene.

A big iron box half full of coal stood on one side of the hearth, and behind it Hanbury Hexam spied some loose wood

'Good,' he said to himself. 'If I can light a fire, I shan't be so badly off after all.'

He had yesterday's *Times* in his pocket, and with this, the wood, cinders, and coal, he built up a pile, which he kindled with one of those useful vestas from his little tin box.

The old grate was still warm, and the fire burned bravely, the dry wood flaming up with a blue-and-yellow flare, lighting the stern countenance of the knight in his starched ruff and black skull-cap.

Hanbury the younger looked up at his great progenitor wonderingly. His dream came back to him, link by link; such a curiously graphic dream. He had seen the quaint old Elizabethan town by that mystic dream-light, as vividly as in the light of day. He had seen himself in his antique garments; seen the stern visage of the old knight melt into kindli-

ness; and, last and best of all, had seen Dorothy's fair face—so like a living face he had looked on in the hopeless agony of parting three years ago.

'Perhaps you were not such a bad old fellow after all,' he said to himself, dreamily contemplating the portrait over the mantelpiece, which seemed to change its expression with every change in the flickering light. 'If you were alive, and I were to appeal to you, I wonder whether you would help me. Would your prototype and successor, Sir Joshua, help me, I wonder, if I were to go to him now, and remind him of his letter to the newspapers?'

The question made him thoughtful. He looked back at his brief and troubled past, and wondered how much of it had been foolishness. Ten years ago Hanbury Hexam had been a friendless young scholar in a great Continental school—a school where a good education was to be had at the lowest possible cost. It would hardly be possible to imagine a lad more utterly alone in the world at fifteen years of age than this young Hexam. His mother was dead. His father had given himself up body and soul to his fatal Chancery suit. Brothers or sisters he had none.

There was an aunt, a somewhat strong-minded maiden lady, Michael Hexam's sister, who cared a little for the desolate boy, and who wrote him an occasional letter telling him the progress of the Chancery suit, and who from time to time sent him a parcel of clothing.

From his aunt, Sarah Hexam, the boy received the tidings of his father's miserable end. In the same letter—a bitter, passionate letter—she told young Hanbury how Sir Joshua Hexam had offered to provide for him.

'I do not know how you may look at the matter,' she said finally, 'but I consider that man your unhappy father's murderer.'

The boy wrote back indignantly to say that he would not accept a sixpence from Sir Joshua to save him from starving. Miss Hexam applauded his resolution. She had a little annuity of her own which she was ready to share with her nephew, taking it for granted that he would be on the high road to fortune before she died. She went over to Tours, where Hanbury was at school, and in that foreign city lived on a mere nothing during his final years of tutelage; and three years after her brother's

death she set out with the lad of eighteen on a voyage of adventure,—she a hardy active woman of fifty-four; he an ardent poetic youth, full of high hopes and noble aspirations.

Very happy was the life these two led together; very moderate their desires, very simple their habits. They travelled through Switzerland and Germany, making long halts in quaint old towns, where the necessaries of life were cheap. Hanbury read a great deal, sketched from nature, and wrote not a little. He sent bright, lively papers to the London magazines, and thereby gained a comfortable addition to his aunt's small income. However humbly they lived —with a simplicity that was almost Spartan—they always lived like a lady and gentleman, and were never mistaken for anything else.

They were at a quiet little water-drinking settlement near the Black Forest, a spring lately discovered by the German doctors, and only frequented by those who were indifferent to the allurements of fashion—when the event occurred which first introduced poetry and passion into Hanbury's life.

He had wandered somewhat far afield one bright

September day with his sketch-book, when he came to an old quarry among the hills—a rough amphitheatre of stone embedded in the craggy hill-side. Above, on the hill-top, a grove of firs stood darkly out against the clear blue sky.

On the upper edge of the quarry, about forty feet from the ground on which he stood, Hanbury Hexam saw a fluttering figure in a white gown, with a scarlet scarf that made a patch of bright colour among the greens and grays of grass and stone.

'Rather a dangerous place,' he thought, 'for a lady to wander in; but I suppose she knows her ground.'

Just at this moment he became aware of the presence of a bony female in a lanky gray costume, a mushroom hat, and green spectacles, who was telegraphing wildly to the distant girl with a large buff parasol.

'Go back!' she screamed; 'go back the other way! the ground isn't safe where you're standing. Go back, Dorothea!'

The ground upon which that light figure was perched certainly had an insecure look. That edge of the hill had been partly undermined by the

excavations below. It was an overhanging path, which might give way at any moment.

'What shall I do?' cried the lady in the green spectacles, tragically. 'I am sure Miss Hexam is in danger, and I don't know how to get at her up there, even if my breath would allow me to climb, which it will not.'

Miss Hexam! This was rather startling for Hanbury. But there was no time to be wasted upon surprise or interrogation.

'I'll find my way up to her,' he said cheerily; and, after one brief and comprehensive survey of the scene, began the ascent.

To the admiring eyes of Miss Limber, of the green spectacles, he seemed to bound from crag to crag with the practised grace of the chamois-hunter in 'Manfred' —over the little patches of sunburnt slippery grass, now on a bit of blue-gray stone, now on a crumbling ledge of sienna-coloured clay, till with one bound he leaped upon the narrow verge, and stood beside the damsel in white.

'Allow me to lead you down by some more secure path,' he said, bareheaded. 'The lady below there is

much alarmed for your safety; and, indeed, this is hardly a secure spot for your rambles.'

'My poor dear governess!' said the young lady, smiling. 'Was she really frightened? I am sure you are very kind to come after me. I climbed up here easily enough, but it does seem rather difficult to go down again; and I confess that I was beginning to feel just a little uncomfortable.'

How pretty she was! A fair and delicate prettiness; a pale oval face framed in dark-brown hair; soft dark eyes; a mouth like Cupid's bow.

'I feel sure there is an easier way down behind those firs,' said Hanbury, 'if you will let me take you that way.'

'You shall take me any way you like that is safe,' she answered easily, 'and that will make poor Miss Limber happy. Look at her waving that parasol at me. I haven't the faintest idea what she means.'

'She means that you are to trust yourself with me, Miss Hexam,' said Hanbury.

It cost him a slight effort to pronounce the name. Could this be Sir Joshua's only child, the great heiress of Hexam Park? Surely not. There were

innumerable Hexams in Loomborough. Why should this fair girl be his enemy's daughter ?

They crossed the hill-top, and on the other side, below the fir trees, beheld a winding path which was safe and easy enough. Down this Hanbury led Miss Hexam. How daintily she stepped from stone to stone ! now on the soft green moss, now on the rough crag. To watch the little feet in their neat buckled shoes was the pleasantest thing in the world ; and then, how sweet to look up at the fair young face, with its happy, innocent smile ! Hanbury wished that descent had gone ten thousand fathoms deep into the bowels of the earth.

If he had rescued her charge from the roaring sea or the raging flames, Miss Limber could not have thanked the young man with more enthusiasm than she displayed. They all three walked home to Gesundheitbrunnen together, a walk of nearly four miles ; during the progress of which Miss Limber, to whom there was no music sweeter than the sound of her own voice, told Hanbury all about herself and her pupil.

The young lady was Miss Hexam, daughter and

heiress of the great Sir Joshua Hexam, 'of whom you have doubtless heard,' said Miss Limber, pompously. She was travelling in the care of her governess; 'and attended only by a courier and maid,' added Miss Limber, with proud humility. She had come to Gesundheitbrunnen in quest of health, the place having been specially recommended by a distinguished Loomborough physician.

'Sir Joshua would have accompanied us,' said Miss Limber, 'but his enormous commercial responsibilities render his prolonged absence from Loomborough impossible; and Miss Hexam's medical advisers recommend a residence of three months at the springs.'

'Have you been here long?' asked Hanbury.

'We came at the beginning of August, and we are to remain till the end of October.'

It was now early in September. Nearly two months of bliss, thought Hanbury, if he could persuade his aunt to remain so long. Luckily she had a fancy for swallowing inordinate quantities of mineral waters, with a vague idea that she was benefiting her constitution.

They came to Gesundheitbrunnen at last, after a four-mile walk that had seemed as nothing to Hanbury. At parting it was incumbent upon him to tell Miss Limber his name. He had debated the advisability of giving a false name as he came along, but his frank mind revolted from the idea of deception, so he handed Miss Limber his card.

'Mr. Hexam!' she screamed. 'How extraordinary!'

'I have the honour to be a namesake of your pupil's. But I believe Hexam is not an uncommon name at Loomborough.'

'True,' replied Miss Limber, 'the original Hexam estate has been divided and subdivided among numerous branches of the family. Sir Joshua would not be the great man he is if he had not strengthened his position as a landed proprietor by commercial enterprise.'

They parted outside the one hotel of the place, a rambling wooden building, to which a room or two had been added from time to time as the reputation of the waters increased. Miss Hexam, her governess, and servants had a small annex to themselves,

and were considered the most important residents at the hotel.

After this, Hanbury and Miss Hexam were continually meeting. Pedestrian exercise was an important feature in the *régime* prescribed by the young lady's medical advisers, and she spent the greater part of every fine day rambling in the forest or among the hills, Miss Limber toiling on beside her, or sitting by the wayside to rest while the younger lady explored some wild romantic spot near at hand.

In these walks Hanbury's attendance was freely permitted. Miss Limber had literary proclivities, read German indifferently, and finding Hanbury a master of the language, gladly availed herself of his assistance. They read 'Faust' together; yes, valorously toiled through the bewildering second part of that mighty work. And then Miss Limber confided to Hanbury the secret of her own authorship. She had written a novel, and although no publisher had yet been found gifted with a mind wide enough to appreciate that great panorama of human life, Miss Limber's faith in her own genius was in no wise shaken.

She introduced Hanbury to her own particular fictitious world, read him chapters of the novel, and, in a word, derived so much pleasure from his society herself, that she entirely overlooked the danger there might be in such society for her pupil. Time glided pleasantly on. The two young people read together, sketched together, worshipped nature together, and lived as in a happy dream.

Hanbury was awakened awfully from that sweet dream-life by the sudden death of his good old aunt, who expired in a fit of apoplexy, brought on possibly by over-indulgence in chalybeate waters. This was a bitter blow to his affections, and it left him penniless. Miss Hexam's income died with her. Hanbury had neither trade nor profession. He had lived a careless holiday life, and now, in his two-and-twentieth year, had nothing better to look to than the pen of a ready writer for maintenance in the present and fortune in the future.

And how with such prospects as these was he to aspire to the hand of Sir Joshua Hexam's daughter?

He paid Dorothea one farewell visit after his aunt's death; told her all the truth about himself,

and told her that he was going into the busy working world to seek his fortune.

'If I win in the great game of chance, you will hear of me again, Dorothea,' he said. 'If I lose——'

'Whether you win or lose, I hope to see you again,' she said, tenderly. 'But oh, Hanbury, why not accept my father's offer? He would receive you as an adopted son; he would make your future so easy. I have often heard him speak of you, and regret his ignorance of your fate.'

'He is very good, but I had rather depend upon my own right arm than on any patron in the world, answered Hanbury, proudly.

He had taken his own way, and had tried what his right arm would do for him in America and in Australia, and had come back a failure; not for lack of energy, or of industry, or of talent; but fate had been against him, and he had never found a friend to give him a helping hand.

CHAPTER V.

HOW THE DREAM CAME TRUE.

The cold winter night struggled through the thick winter darkness at last, and found Hanbury Hexam still seated before the wide old hearth, absorbed in thought. Long as the hours had been, they had not been too long for the struggle betwixt pride and fate. When the day dawned, Hanbury had made up his mind to apply to Sir Joshua Hexam for a stool in that commercial magnate's counting-house. Long ago common sense had taught him to acquit Sir Joshua of any blame in the matter of the fatal Chancery suit; yet pride had prevented his acceptance of the great man's help.

At nine o'clock the sub-librarian unlocked the door, and Hanbury was free. He walked straight to Sir Joshua's warehouse, a palatial building in one of

the richest streets in the rich city of Loomborough. Very different was Sir Joshua's counting-house from the quiet little room where the dreamer had seen Sir Hanbury poring over his ledger. Sir Joshua's offices were like a bank: such shining mahogany desks; such glittering brass rails dividing the desks; such splendid stoves and glowing fires, and wonderful contrivances in the way of speaking-tubes; such well-dressed clerks, with pens behind their ears, and a general appearance of being weighed down by the magnitude of the business.

When Hanbury asked to see Sir Joshua, the gentleman to whom he had addressed himself looked as surprised as if he had offered to send up his card to Queen Victoria.

'Have you an appointment?' he asked.

'No.'

'Quite impossible, then; Sir Joshua never sees any one except by appointment.'

'Be so kind as to take him my card, and ask him to favour me with an early appointment,' said Hanbury.

The clerk looked at the card, and departed

wondering. Five minutes afterwards Hanbury was closeted with Sir Joshua in a handsome apartment, Turkey carpeted, warmed by a huge fire, provided with all the luxurious appliances that embellish the dull labour of commercial life.

On the 27th of December, after a sorely desolate Christmas, spent for the most part in the snowy streets of Loomborough, Hanbury took his seat in his kinsman's office.

'Work honestly, and you shall be honestly rewarded,' the old man had said to him, not unkindly. He looked so like Sir Hanbury of the dream-picture as he made this little speech.

Hanbury did work honestly and well. Those three years of hard fighting with ill fortune had sharpened wits that were originally bright. Before Hanbury had been a year in the office he had proved himself worth three ordinary clerks, and Sir Joshua had invited him to dine at Hexham Park every alternate Sunday.

In the second year of the young man's clerkship there came a great commercial crisis. House after house went down as with the shock of an earth-

quake; and for three awful days the great firm of Hexam and Co. tottered with the fall of its allies. In that crisis Hanbury Hexam displayed an energy and a firmness which went far to right the ship. Sir Joshua was ill at the time, and thus the master spirit of the firm was wanting when his presence seemed most needed. From that hour the young man was taken to his employer's heart, and became verily an adopted son.

Two years later he was a junior partner in the great house, and Dorothea Hexam's betrothed husband.

It was on one of the dark days before Christmas that the two lovers went together to the old library at Loomborough. An important purchase of books had just been made for the institution, and Hanbury wished Dorothea to see them.

Perhaps it was only an excuse for showing his betrothed the quaint old chamber where he had dreamed that curious dream.

The scene was almost the same as on his first visit. There was the old man hugging the fire, and there sat the compiler of prophecies, fenced in with

books at his distant table. The local poet was absent.

Hanbury led Dorothea to the recess by the painted window, and they seated themselves there side by side.

'What a dear old place it is!' said Dorothea. 'It's ages since I've been here.'

'Yes, it's a nice old place,' answered her happy lover, 'I've reason to be fond of it. I owe all my present happiness to a dream I had here. I had made up my mind to sail for New Zealand in the next emigrant ship, to work as a field labourer perhaps, when I got there; and I had written you a long letter of farewell, when I fell asleep, and had a curious dream about him,' pointing to Sir Hanbury's portrait.

And then he told her his dream.

'Such dreams are sent by our guardian angels, Hanbury,' she said gently, 'to teach us faith in God.'

A VERY NARROW ESCAPE.

It was not quite a year since Mr. George Hartfield, the leading solicitor in the market town of Norbury, had returned from his honeymoon tour, bringing with him the prettiest little wife that the good old town had boasted for a long time. George was only thirty years of age, but his wife looked a mere girl, and was at least eleven years his junior, much to the disgust of more mature damsels, who would have been very willing to step into the proprietorship of the good-looking young lawyer and his prim respectable old house, which was one of the most conspicuous dwellings in the upper and more rural part of the High Street. Mr. Hartfield had inherited an excellent business from his father, and was altogether a person of some importance in the opinion of the

Norbury world at large, and of himself in particular.

The wife was a shy girlish creature, who seemed scarcely fit to be mistress of that big formal house, with its shining wainscoted walls and grim old furniture—furniture that had been fashionable in the days of George's grandfather—gloomy old mahogany four-posters and walnut-wood presses, in the polished panels whereof sentimental little Alice Hartfield' whose head was a kind of branch depot of the circulating library, used to fancy she saw ghosts in the gloaming. In honest truth, she did not take much to the house in the High Street, and looked back with fond regretfulness to the bright country home from which George had won her; but Mr. Hartfield being of an arbitrary temper, and convinced that the old house was perfection, she had never ventured to hint her dislike. It must be owned that the evenings were long and dull for so girlish a matron. George Hartfield was often out—sometimes at a public dinner at the Crown Hotel, sometimes at a social club held at the same prosperous tavern, sometimes playing billiards with bachelor clients—

all in the way of business, of course, as he told his wife; but the evenings during which he was absent were not the less lonely on that account.

Mr. Hartfield employed three clerks: a gentlemanly young man, who was articled; a stripling, for copying and out-of-door work; and a grey-haired old man, with a face upon which there was a look of settled melancholy. Mr. Bestow, the articled clerk, and Thomas Dregger, the stripling, had christened him Old Dismal, and spoke of him commonly by that disrespectful sobriquet. If he ever heard the name, it apparently troubled him very little. He rarely spoke, except so far as his business required him to speak; and, in the two years that he had been with Mr. Hartfield, he had not advanced by so much as one step towards intimacy with his fellow-workers. He lived three miles out of Norbury, walking to and from the office in all weathers, and no one had ever seen the inside of his home.

Her first year of married life closed in sorrow and disappointment for Alice Hartfield. The baby-stranger, from whose coming she had expected so much pleasure, only opened its eyes upon this world

to close them again for ever. She dwelt upon this loss with a grief which seemed to her husband just a little exaggerated, and it is possible that her tears and sad looks drove him to his club at the 'Crown' rather more often this year than in the previous winter. It was not that he was unkind or indifferent to his pretty young wife. He fancied that she was perfectly happy with her books and work and piano, in the interval between six o'clock and eleven, at which hour he punctually returned to his abode, as sober as when he left home, well pleased with himself and with the world at large.

The two younger clerks commented very freely upon the solicitor's conduct in his domestic capacity.

'If I had such a pretty wife, I wouldn't leave her alone evening after evening as our governor does,' remarked the stripling, pertly; 'I wonder he isn't ashamed of himself.'

'He ought to take her more into society certainly,' replied Mr. Bestow, the articled clerk, who was in much request in that brilliant circle which constituted Norbury 'society.'

Mr. Morgan, the old clerk, looked up from his desk with a sigh.

'What, my funereal friend,' cried Bestow, 'do you mean to say you are interested in the subject?'

'I am very much interested in Mrs. Hartfield,' the old man answered quietly; 'she is always kind to me. It is a good sign when a woman of her age takes the trouble to be polite to an old man like me—a sign that the heart's in the right place. I wish her husband understood her better. I don't think she wants to be taken to tea parties, Mr. Bestow; but I do think she wants a little more sympathy.'

This was a long speech for Mr. Morgan. The two younger men stared at him superciliously, and then went on with their work. From the first day of her coming to be mistress of the old house William Morgan had shown himself interested in his master's wife. He was always pleased to perform any little service for her, and seemed needlessly grateful for the smallest kindness at her hands. His way home took him the whole length of the town; and Mrs Hartfield used to entrust him with her books to

change at the circulating library, an office which he performed with much taste and discretion.

'I take the liberty to carry a volume home with me for the night, at odd times,' he said to her one day.

'What, Mr. Morgan, do you read novels?'

'No, madam; but I have a niece living with me who is glad to skim the volumes of an evening.'

'Indeed! You never spoke of her before. Is your niece married?'

'She—she is a widow—to all intents and purposes. Her husband deserted her three years ago, and left her and her boy on my hands. But we are very happy together, I thank God.'

'The husband must have been a bad man.'

'He was a most consummate scoundrel!' answered the old clerk, with suppressed intensity.

'How hard it must be for you to work for all three!' said Alice.

'It will be harder for the two that are left when I am gone. My niece is able to earn a little money at her needle, but very little. It is a dark look-out for the future.'

One morning, early in the spring, Mr. Hartfield came into the office with a very dashing gentleman, a new client, who had just come into a handsome fortune by the death of old Squire Comberford, of Comberford Hall, seven miles from Norbury. Edgar Comberford, the new proprietor, was a nephew of the old man, and had been a schoolfellow of George Hartfield's fifteen years before. Since that time he had disappeared from the ken of Norbury, and was supposed to have led a wild life in foreign lands. He was eminently handsome, and in high spirits at his accession to the Comberford Hall estate.

'There are the papers, title-deeds, leases, and so on,' said George Hartfield, pointing to three japanned boxes on a shelf in the office; 'do you want to see them?'

'Not I, George,' answered Mr. Comberford, gaily; 'it is quite enough for me to know that the lands are free from mortgages, and that the rents come in briskly. The papers couldn't be in better hands. Holloa! what's that?'

It was Mr. Morgan, the old clerk, who had put

his head in at the door of the office, and suddenly withdrawn it.

'Only one of my clerks,' answered George Hartfield. 'Come in, Morgan!' he bawled; but the clerk did not reply, and the two young men left the office —Mr. Comberford to be introduced to his friend's wife.

He was not a little surprised by her grace and beauty; not a little fascinated by her shy, girlish manners. He stayed to dinner, and contrived to make himself agreeable to both his host and hostess, giving an animated account of his adventures in Mexico during the last two years.

'I should never have come from there, George, but for my uncle's death,' he said. 'I was thoroughly cleaned out when I left England, and meant to live and die abroad.'

After this social dinner Mr. Comberford dropped in very often at his friend's house. He seemed to have some perpetual reason for seeing the solicitor on business, and happened, by a kind of fatality, to call when the master of the house was out. Would he leave a statement of his business with the clerk?

No, he would wait; and he strolled unannounced into the little sitting-room at the back of the offices, where Mrs. Hartfield spent her mornings. It was the prettiest room in the house, opening into a small garden, at the end of which there was a narrow creek —an inlet from the river that flowed through Norbury. By and by Mr. Comberford took to approaching the house by this way. He was an expert waterman, and spent a good deal of his time on the river. So it was an easy and natural thing for him to moor his boat at the bottom of George Hartfield's garden, and step on shore. He always found Alice in her sitting-room, and he found a look in her face which told him his visits were not unwelcome. He was a thorough man of the world, and knew the danger of the game he was playing, nor did he yield without a struggle to the temptation that had overtaken him Such a heart as he had was hit harder than it had been of late years. The outside world of Norbury had not yet been awakened to the scandal of Mr. Comberford's frequent visits to the lawyer's house, nor was the lawyer himself alarmed by them; but the younger clerks were quick to remark upon the

length and frequency of these morning calls, and on George Hartfield's blindness to the fact.

Edgar Comberford had been settled at the Hall for six months, when George Hartfield had occasion to go to Paris on business. He had intended to take his wife with him for the trip, but the weather was sultry and oppressive, and he went alone. Mrs. Hartfield seemed very little disappointed by this change in his plans. Mr. Comberford had assured her that Paris was quite unbearable in July. It was upon his business that George Hartfield was engaged. He went to make a settlement with a Parisian money-lender who had advanced money to the young man in the days of his insolvency, and who now put in an exorbitant claim for interest.

The first day of Mr. Hartfield's absence went by without any visit from Mr. Comberford, but in the evening, when the clerks were gone and Alice was sitting alone and very low-spirited, the familiar sound of the boat grating against the woodwork at the bottom of the garden struck upon her ear, and brought a sudden blush into her cheeks. She looked up with a movement of surprise as Edgar Comberford

came across the garden.' He came in at the open window with the air of a person who had a perfect right to be there, and seated himself opposite to Alice, at the little table where she was drinking tea.

'I thought you would give me a cup of tea after my row, Mrs. Hartfield,' he said, 'and I could not pass the creek without begging for one. I dread going home to the desolation of the Hall—empty rooms and a cross old housekeeper. I think I shall go back to Mexico before the year is out.'

Alice gave a little start.

'What!' she said, 'leave the Hall for ever?'

'In all probability for ever. A man seldom comes home a second time from such a place as Mexico.'

'But why should you go back there? why should you be tired of the Hall so soon?'

'Why should I be tired of life altogether? Why should I wish to run away from myself—from you?'

And then he went on to speak of his love for her, in dark hints rather than in plain words. She tried to reprove him, tried to show him that she was angry, but the attempt was a very feeble one. She could only insist that he should leave her imme-

diately. He did leave her, but not immediately, and not till she had changed insistence into piteous entreaty.

The boat had scarcely shot away in the twilight when the door between the sitting-room and the office opened, and the old clerk, Morgan, appeared on the threshold.

'You here, Mr. Morgan!' exclaimed Alice, making a vain attempt to conceal her tears; 'I thought all the clerks had gone.'

'I had some letters to copy, Mrs. Hartfield. Can I do anything for you in the town to-night?'

'Nothing, thank you.'

He lingered, twisting the brim of his shabby old hat round and round in his thin wrinkled hands.

'I wish to heaven I might speak to you freely,' he said at last, 'without offending or wounding you.'

'About what?'

'About the man who has just left you.'

'Mr. Comberford, my husband's friend?'

'Your husband's direst, deadliest foe—and yours,' answered the old man, passionately.

'What right have you to say that?' asked Alice, trembling with indignation.

'The right given me by my knowledge of mankind, and, above all, by my knowledge of Edgar Comberford.'

'What knowledge can you have of Mr. Comberford? Did you ever see him before he came to this office?'

'Never; but his name is a word of dire meaning in my life. Ask him what became of the girl he stole away from an honourable home and left in a wretched London lodging four years ago. Ask him to tell you the fate of Bessie Raynor.'

'Why should I trouble myself about his affairs? And who is this Bessie Raynor?'

'Never mind who she is, Mrs. Hartfield. She was a good girl before he met her. She will never be a happy woman again. Ask him about her if you doubt what I tell you, and you will see by his countenance whether he is innocent or guilty. Knowing what I do, I am bound to warn you of his real character.'

'I do not require any such warning,' replied Alice,

coldly; 'Mr. Comberford is no more to me than any other client of my husband's. And I beg that you will not trouble yourself to dictate my conduct to him.'

'I see that I have offended you.'

'I do not like spies.'

'I am no spy, Mrs. Hartfield. I am an old man, and have had bitter cause to know the wickedness of the world. Your sweet face has been a kind of light to me ever since your husband brought you home to this house. God forbid that light should ever be clouded by the shadow of disgrace!'

He bowed and left her—left her standing in a reverie, looking absently out upon the dusky fields beyond the little garden and the winding creek. She was angry, unhappy, bewildered.

'I wish George had taken me to Paris,' she thought. 'He ought not to leave me alone in a dreary old house like this, to be insulted by a clerk.'

After this evening she passed Mr. Morgan without speaking to him, much to the old man's concern. The days went by, and not one passed without a visit from Edgar Comberford, although in that first even-

ing Alice had expressly forbidden him to call again during her husband's absence. He was not easily to be put aside. He knew the weakness of the girl's unschooled nature, and knew how to trade upon it. His tender talk of the life that might have been had Alice been free—his glowing descriptions of distant lands which those two might have seen, side by side, of countries where the commonest life was a kind of poetry—charmed her in spite of herself. She knew the guilt involved in this dangerous pleasure, and hated herself for her weakness, and yet looked forward with a dull sense of dread to her husband's return. Nothing could tempt her to sin against George Hartfield, she told Edgar, however unsuited they might be to each other. She was his wife, and would do her duty to the end of her life. But the tempter was not convinced.

One day she ventured to ask him about Bessie Raynor. He looked startled, Alice thought, at the sound of the name, but he declared that it was strange to him; and Alice was weak enough to believe his assertion. It had been a mere ruse of the old clerk's to frighten her, she thought. The poor

dismal old creature had tried to make her miserable about the only acquaintance that gave her any pleasure.

Mr. Hartfield had been away ten days, when Mr. Comberford came in upon Alice suddenly one morning with a very grave countenance. The neat little parlour-maid was only just clearing away the breakfast-things when he came, and lingered inquisitively to hear the meaning of this early visit.

'I am sorry to say I have rather bad news of your husband, Mrs. Hartfield,' he said in answer to Alice's expression of surprise. 'He has been taken ill with some kind of low fever, which is a good deal about in Paris just now. Don't be alarmed; it is nothing very serious; but he wants you to go across to him. His doctor, a Frenchman, has written to me, but there is an enclosure for you from the patient.'

He handed her a slip of foreign paper, on which there were a few lines in her husband's hand:

'DEAR ALICE,—Please come over to me at once, if you are not afraid of the journey. Comberford can escort you, as he is wanted over here.—Yours, &c.,

'G. H.'

'You'll not be afraid of the journey?' asked Mr. Comberford.

'Not at all; I should not mind going alone.'

'But, you see, I am due there, so you cannot deny me the pleasure of being your escort.'

'It is not a very pleasurable occasion,' said Alice, with some embarrassment, as she twisted the slip of writing round and round her fingers. She was wondering whether the strict moralists of Norbury would altogether approve of such an escort.

Mr. Comberford gave her little time to think. He went into the clerks' office to tell Mr. Bestow of his employer's illness, and to make inquiries about the London trains. William Morgan looked up from his desk and watched his master's client thoughtfully as he lounged against the mantelpiece reading the time-table.

There was no possibility of going to Paris earlier than by the night mail. Mrs. Hartfield would have to go first to London—a three hours' journey. There was a train left Norbury at a quarter to four in the afternoon, which would take the travellers in ample time for the Dover mail. Mr. Comberford decided

upon going by this, and left Alice in order to make his preparations for the journey. He did not, however, go back to the Hall, but fidgeted in and out of the lawyer's house several times in the course of the day on some pretence or other, spending the interval at the 'Crown,' where he drank brandy and soda-water to an extent that astonished the waiters. But in spite of all he had drunk, he looked pale and anxious when he came at three o'clock ready to take Mrs. Hartfield to the station.

Alice was just stepping into the fly, when William Morgan came out of the house, with a carpet bag in one hand and a morocco office bag in the other.

'Why, where the deuce are you going?' asked Mr. Comberford.

'I am to be your fellow-traveller, sir; at least, I am going second class by the same train.'

'To London?'

'No, sir, to Paris. Mr. Bestow sends me across with papers.'

'Why, what consummate folly of Bestow's! Your master is not fit for business. He won't be able to attend to anything for days to come.'

'I hope he may be better than you think, sir. In any case, I am bound to obey Mr. Bestow's orders.'

He spoke in a mechanical kind of tone, nor did his countenance express the faintest interest in his work.

Mr. Comberford laughed grimly to himself as they drove away with the old man on the box.

'That old fool's company can make very little difference,' he muttered, and then grew moodier than he was wont to be in Alice Hartfield's company.

He brightened considerably by and by, when they were alone in a first-class compartment, flying Londonwards at express rate; and he succeeded in making Alice believe that her husband's illness was only a trifling matter, and that she had no occasion to be anxious about him.

'Men think so much of the slightest touch of illness,' he said, 'and are always in a hurry to summon their wives. We are such helpless creatures, you see, and so miserable without the comfort of a woman's presence.'

And then he went on to speak of his own solitary position.

'What is to become of me in the hour of sickness, Alice,' he asked, 'with no one but a gloomy old housekeeper to care for me?'

'You will marry by and by, I dare say, and have a wife to care for you.'

'Never, Alice. There is only one woman on earth I care for; and if she cannot be my wife, I will go down to my grave a bachelor.'

'You must not talk to me like that; it is taking a mean advantage of my position. You know that I am with you at my husband's wish.'

'Yes, you have his order for the journey. Poor dear George, what a fine bold hand he writes, doesn't he?'

Mrs. Hartfield did not see the sardonic grin which accompanied this trivial remark, nor did Mr. Comberford again offend her by any allusion to his hopeless passion. It was pitch dark when they reached Dover, not a star in the sky, and a high wind blowing. There was considerable confusion in getting on board, and Mrs. Hartfield scarcely knew where she was till she found herself standing on the deck of a steamer arm-in-arm with Edgar Comberford, while

the lamps of Dover receded rapidly from her vision. Her companion persuaded her to remain on deck.

'There is an atmosphere of sea-sickness below that would inevitably make you ill,' he said. 'Let me find you a comfortable corner, where you can be secure from wind and weather.'

He found a sheltered nook by one of the paddle-boxes, and here Mrs. Hartfield sat comfortably wrapped in shawls and railway rugs, and amused by her fellow-traveller's conversation. He seemed now in the highest possible spirits, and did his uttermost to entertain her; but well as he succeeded in doing this, he could not make her quite unconscious of the passage of time.

'I thought the steamer crossed in an hour and a half,' she said; 'but we have surely been more than two hours on board.'

'Oh dear no, I think not. There's a good deal of wind to-night, however; so I dare say the passage will take a little longer than usual.

Mrs. Hartfield questioned him about the time more than once after this, but he was unable to give her any definite answer.

It was all right, he said vaguely, and his spirits mounted as the boat plunged gaily through the waters.

With the first gleam of morning they neared the shore. Their luggage was ready for landing among the first, only a couple of carpet bags and a portmanteau, which were pounced upon speedily by officials, and borne off to a building in the distance.

Mr. Comberford led Alice up the steps, and put her at once into a fly that loomed duskily out upon them in the chilly atmosphere. He came back to her presently with the luggage, and seated himself by her side; but before he could rejoin her she had asked the driver the name of the place, and he had told her that she was in Ostend.

She looked at Edgar Comberford with a face full of terror. 'What a wretched mistake!' she said; 'we have come by the wrong steamer. Why did you not tell me the truth on board? But of course we can go from here to Paris. It is only the loss of time that annoys me.'

'My darling Alice, you are as innocent as a baby,' exclaimed Mr. Comberford, with a triumphant

smile. 'We are no more going to Paris than we are going to the moon. All stratagems are fair in love and war. George Hartfield is as well as ever he was in his life, and the little note you so implicitly believed in was only a specimen of imitative penmanship by your humble servant. I wanted to get you away from that dreary old town without *esclandre*, my love. We are bound for the sunny Rhineland, there to forget that there is such a place as Norbury, or such a person as George Hartfield.'

'And you think that I will go with you?'

'My dearest, I do not think you so foolish as to resist your fate. The Rubicon is passed, and return utterly impossible. We gave your husband's old clerk the slip at Dover. He will be in Paris at seven o'clock, with the story of your journey, which will be at once set down as an elopement.'

'I am not so weak or so wicked as you think,' cried Alice, snatching her hand indignantly from his grasp. 'Foolish and guilty as I have been in listening to you, I am not so base as you seem to have thought me. You must take me on to Paris by the first train, Mr. Comberford, or I must go alone.'

'Impossible!'

'Where are we going now?'

'To an hotel. I must get you some breakfast. There is no train for Paris till seven; there is one for Cologne at the same hour, and it is by that we are to travel.'

Alice looked at him in despair. Whatever love she had felt for him died a sudden death in this moment of agony. How gladly would she have welcomed her husband's honest face! How bitterly she reproached herself for her neglect of the old clerk's warning!

'He was my truest friend,' she thought, 'and I refused to listen to him.'

They were at the door of an hotel by this time. While the driver was ringing, a second fly drove up, and an old man alighted. It was Morgan, the clerk.

Alice gave a cry of delight, and called him to the door of the vehicle.

'There has been a mistake,' she said; 'Mr. Comberford brought me by the wrong boat. But, thank Heaven, you came the same way. You can take me on to Paris.'

'Or back to Norbury, whichever you prefer, madam,' answered the old clerk, respectfully. 'Mr. Comberford has an unfortunate habit of making mistakes. This is not the first time he has signed another man's name by mistake. There was an awkward business about a forged accommodation bill, some years ago, which induced Mr. Comberford to cross the Atlantic.'

'What do you mean, sir?' cried the younger man, indignantly.

'I mean that there is no one in the world who knows you better than Bessie Raynor's uncle,' answered William Morgan. 'I never set eyes on your false face till you came into my master's office, but I have heard your history from the lips of a woman who loved you, and who would willingly have made the best of it. You have not changed for the better since your days of poverty, and you have not taken the trouble to ascertain what became of the girl who shared your hardships and disgrace. She is living with me, sir, three miles from Norbury, where you are now so grand a gentleman. I told this lady to beware of you, but she was too confiding to doubt

you, and not confiding enough to believe me. I think, however, you have thrown off the mask too soon.'

'Don't lecture me, sir. The lady must decide between us. Whatever wrong I have done has been done for her sake. I had reason to think she loved me.'

This was said with a tone of bitter reproach, and then the young man stood awaiting his fate with a moody countenance.

'I think I had better take you on to Paris, Mrs. Hartfield,' said the clerk. 'It would set Norbury folks talking if we went straight home. You can tell your husband the whole truth, and he can settle the score with this gentleman.'

'I am going straight on to Germany,' said Mr. Comberford. 'If Hartfield wants me, he must follow me there.'

He walked into the hotel, the door of which had just been opened by a sleepy-looking waiter, leaving Alice under the care of the old clerk. She went to Paris with him, and there made the best story she could to her husband, humbly confessing her own errors.

'I suppose I must have flirted with him a little, George,' she said shyly, 'or he would never have done such a wild wicked thing.'

And this confession had a very good effect upon George Hartfield, who felt that he had been wanting in due care and consideration for his pretty young wife. He withdrew himself from the club at the 'Crown,' left off billiards, and took to rowing Alice on the river in the summer evenings, and reading to her or playing chess with her in the winter. He did not follow Mr. Comberford to Germany, but contented himself with writing a formal letter, relinquishing the conduct of that gentleman's affairs.

Mr. Comberford came back to the Hall three years afterwards, with an aristocratic but by no means agreeable wife. Before returning he took steps to settle a modest annuity upon Mr. Morgan's niece, Bessie Raynor; an annuity which was accepted by the young woman, but the quarterly payments of which were carefully banked against that rainy day when William Morgan should be no more. The old man scorned to touch a penny of Edgar Comberford's money.

MY UNLUCKY FRIEND.

AMONG my fellow-passengers on the overland route from Calcutta there were many of a more lively temperament and social turn than Mr. John Angus Marlow, civil engineer; yet it was curiously to that gentleman I chiefly attached myself during my homeward voyage, some years ago. He was forty years of age, grave—nay, indeed, almost stern of speech and manner; a man whom very few feminine critics would have called handsome, but in whose dark, thoughtful face, deep-set gray eyes, and strongly-marked black eyebrows there was a stamp of intellectual power which no physiognomist could fail to recognize. His professional position was high, and he was commonly reputed a rich man. He was a bachelor, and was now returning to his native country as an invalid, having overtaxed both mind and body

in the cause of a late arduous undertaking in railway construction. I too, a lieutenant in her Majesty's service, was returning home on sick leave, but with very little claim to pity on the score of ill-health, and with most cheerful anticipations of a pleasant holiday among familiar scenes and old friends.

I had met Marlow in society before leaving Calcutta, and, the ice being thus broken between us, our acquaintance quickly ripened into something more than the ordinary companionship of fellow-travellers. He was my senior by fifteen years, and evidently in weak health; so I was pleased to be of use to him in any small matters whereby I might spare him some of the fatigue of the journey, and to defer on all occasions to his humour. I found him very variable in mood, at times silent and thoughtful to an extreme degree, at other times full of pleasant conversation. He had read much and thought much, had a warm appreciation of art, and a refined taste in all matters, but was not a man likely to shine in general society. He grew singularly depressed in manner as we drew nearer the end of our passage; and while we walked the deck of the steamer together

one moonlight night, smoking our cigars in meditative silence, I ventured to make some remark on the subject.

'Gloomy do you think me?' he asked; 'and I dare say you are right. I ought to be glad to see England again, no doubt, but I cannot summon up any sense of pleasure in the anticipation. I have been so long away from—well, I suppose one must call one's birthplace home—that I have lost all interest in the place and its belongings. Those whom I loved are dead. This voyage is altogether a concession to my doctors. I was happy in the pursuit of my profession, and I like India.'

'You must find life rather dismal up the country,' said I, 'as a bachelor.'

'Yes,' he answered, with a faint sigh, 'it is lonely enough; but a man who works as hard as I have done has little time to feel the loneliness of his life.'

'You should marry, and take a wife back to India with you,' I ventured to suggest.

He gave a short laugh as he threw away the end of his cigar.

'I finished with that kind of thing when I was

twenty,' he said. 'I had my dream, and it came to a bad ending. I am not a man to be fooled twice.'

It was late in October when we landed at Southampton. I was engaged to spend the next month in Scotland with a brother officer, but my Christmas was to be passed at my father's house in Warwickshire; and before parting with John Marlow, I extorted from him a promise that he would run down to us for a week at that festive season. He made the promise somewhat unwillingly, though not ungraciously.

'It is very good of you to care for such a dull old fellow as I am, Frank,' he said; and with this we parted.

When my month's sport in Scotland was ended, I hastened home in high spirits and rude health. I found my three sisters—Clara, Georgy, and Jessy—waiting for me at the railway station; three tall blooming damsels, whom I had left some years before in pinafores, short skirts, and scarlet stockings. They were eager to tell me all the home news, and almost bewildered me by their chatter as we drove from the station to the lodge gates.

'We have a new governess, Frank,' said Clara, when they had informed me of all the births, deaths, and marriages, and engagements to marry among our friends and neighbours; 'poor old Miss Colby's health gave way at last, and she has taken a dear little cottage in Lord Leigh's model village. So papa insisted on getting some one else to finish us in music and languages, and so on. Miss Lawson, our new governess, is only twenty, just two years older than I, but she is very accomplished, and so pretty. I hope you won't fall in love with her, Frank.'

This I protested was a most improbable contingency; but I was not the less curious to see the lady in question.

'You will have plenty of her society,' said Georgy; 'she is always with us. Papa likes her amazingly.'

As my father had been ten years a widower, I suggested that this liking on his part might be dangerous; but the three girls indignantly repudiated the idea, and I was content to defer to their judgment.

When we assembled in the drawing-room before dinner, I found Miss Lawson talking to Georgy in one of the windows, and I had some few minutes' leisure in which to observe her before my sister beckoned me across the room in order to present me to the stranger. She was a tall aristocratic-looking girl, with a perfect profile, dark-brown hair, hazel eyes, and a singularly pale complexion; a girl whom no one could fail to observe and admire, but about whose beauty there might nevertheless be some difference of opinion. When I had been talking to her for some minutes her expression struck me as not altogether agreeable. Her lips were too thin for my notion of feminine beauty, and her chin was too prominent. Her eyes were perfect in colour, but I thought them somewhat wanting in depth and softness. Not long, however, did I remain critical upon the subject of Miss Lawson's beauty. There was a charm about her voice and manner not easily to be resisted by a man of my age; and when I retired to my room that night I had no feeling but unqualified admiration for my sisters' governess.

I told them next day of the invitation I had given Mr. Marlow, and his acceptance thereof.

'I wish he might take a fancy to you, Clara,' I said, laughing. 'It would be a capital match. John Marlow is one of the best fellows I ever met, and a rich man into the bargain.'

'And forty years of age, as you admitted just now,' exclaimed Clara, indignantly. 'I am not so desperately in want of offers, Mr. Frank, nor so mercenary as to care for your friend's money.'

Miss Lawson looked up from a water-coloured sketch which she was finishing for Georgy.

'Mr. John Marlow,' she repeated; 'my mother once knew a gentleman of that name. Do you know if he comes from Hadleigh Court, Lincolnshire?'

'Yes, Miss Lawson. He owns a place of that name, I believe. Have you ever seen him?'

'Oh dear no! He went to India before I was born. I have heard my mother speak of him. That is all I know of the gentleman.'

Christmas came, and with it several visitors; amongst them John Marlow. He had improved in

health; but his quiet manners seemed more than usually quiet when compared with the somewhat boisterous gaiety of our country friends, whose high spirits had never been subdued by hard work or Oriental sunshine. My sisters voted him the dullest of bachelors, and declared that his society was absolutely depressing.

'There must be some melancholy secret connected with the poor man's early life,' said Clara; 'and I believe Margaret Lawson knows all about it. You should have seen his face when I introduced him to her, Frank. He started as if he had seen a ghost, but said nothing, and seemed quite glad to get away from her after a few formal sentences about the weather, and so on.'

This was on the morning after my friend's arrival. I watched his movements in the drawing-room that evening, and saw that he studiously avoided Miss Lawson's society, devoting himself chiefly to my sister Clara, who seemed on this occasion to find him by no means dull or disagreeable.

We smoked our cigars together that night on a terrace outside the drawing-room windows, when the

rest of our party had retired; and while we were doing so John Marlow astonished me by saying,—

'Should you be very angry, Frank, if I brought my visit to an abrupt close, and left you to-morrow morning by an early train?'

'I should be very sorry,' I replied. 'But what on earth should induce you to run away from us like that?'

'A kind of panic, Frank. You will laugh at me for my folly. I told you I had had my dream, and that it came to a bad end. I never thought to be reminded of that bitter ending as I have been since I came into this house. It's no use trying to keep my secret from you, Frank. Your sister's governess, Miss Lawson, is the daughter and the living image of the only woman I ever loved, the woman who jilted me under circumstances of peculiar heartlessness. I was her junior by a couple of years, and worshipped her with a slavish passion. She made me a foil to another man, and threw me off remorselessly when she had brought him to her feet. She was a girl of good birth and position, but without money. Captain Lawson,

the man she married, was well off, but a dissipated scoundrel, who would have run through a much larger fortune than that which he had inherited from his father's commercial successes. He died early, and left his widow and child dependent on his family, who were not the sort of people to do much for them. She —Florence Lawson, his widow—did not long survive him. The news of her death reached me in India fifteen years ago. I never thought to look upon the face of her daughter.'

'And you would run away from here on this account?'

'Yes, Frank; I am very weak upon this subject. It seems to me as if there was a kind of fatality in my meeting Florence Lawson's daughter. I have laboured so hard to forget that woman, and the harm she inflicted on me. I thought the very memory of my wrongs was blotted from my mind; but the sight of that girl brought the old pain back with all its sharpness. I can't trust myself in her society, Frank. Let me be wise, and leave her.'

I was astonished by this almost childish weakness in such a man as John Marlow, and used my

utmost eloquence to argue him out of his folly. My reasoning prevailed at last, and he consented to remain with us.

We spent the next day in an excursion to Warwick Castle. Miss Lawson was with us; and while we were exploring the fine old rooms, I saw her more than once engaged in conversation with Mr. Marlow; nor did he take any pains to avoid her in the drawing-room that evening.

Several days passed, and John Marlow said no more about leaving us. He was so undemonstrative in his manners as to attract little notice from strangers; but I, who really liked him, watched him closely, and I saw that his attention was given almost exclusively to Margaret Lawson. It seemed to me that he was drawn to her always against his will. He approached her in a kind of half-reluctant manner; but, once by her side, he never quitted her till the evening was ended. She, for her part, appeared to take much interest in his society, and was always ready to sing or play at his request. Of course this did not escape the quick observation of my sisters, and one morning when I

dropped into the schoolroom during Miss Lawson's absence, the subject was discussed among them.

'I dare say she would marry him for the sake of a position,' said Clara. 'She has no prospect except matrimony, and I know she hates a life of dependence on her rich relations, purse-proud, disagreeable people, according to her account of them.'

'I hope she would marry him for his own sake,' I answered; 'I should be sorry for John Marlow if it were otherwise, for I believe him to be a man of very deep feelings.'

'Then he had better steer clear of Margaret Lawson,' said my sister. 'Whatever heart she has to give is bestowed elsewhere. She left her last situation on account of a love affair with the only son of the house, a Mr. Horace Rawdon. His father, Sir Michael Rawdon, was furious against the young man, and sent him abroad on account of the affair. Margaret told me the story with her own lips, and showed me Mr. Rawdon's portrait. He and all his family are as poor as church mice, she told me, but they had great expectations in the matrimonial way for the young man. He might have married his

cousin, the only child of a rich manufacturer, who has a splendid place near Rawdon Park, and who very much wished for an alliance between the two families.'

The first time I found myself alone with him after this conversation I told John Marlow what I had heard from my sister, determined that he should not suffer a second time from a misplaced affection, if any effort of mine could prevent the sacrifice. The effect of my words was much more severe than I had anticipated, and I saw that the grave iron-gray bachelor had been hard hit.

'I must know how far this affair has gone,' he said abruptly. 'I will ask Margaret for an explanation.'

'Will that be fair to my sisters?' I asked. 'Miss Lawson may very justly consider them guilty of a breach of confidence, and she will assuredly think me an arrant snob for talking of her affairs. I should not have broached the subject if you had not expressed a kind of dread of this girl's influence over your mind.'

'Yes,' he replied, 'I did fear her influence, heaven

knows whether wisely or foolishly. I will take care not to commit you or your sisters. But I must know the truth from Margaret's own lips. I have the right of a future husband to question her. The die is cast, Frank. She has promised to be my wife. It is rather rapid work, no doubt; but Miss Lawson's dependent position justified my acting promptly, and no lapse of time could make me love her better than I do. I have urged her to consent to an early marriage, and I hope to marry her from her uncle's house in London before the beginning of Lent. You must not think me a fool for this sudden passion, Frank. This girl brought the memory of my youth back to me, and it is in her power to atone for all the pain her mother inflicted upon me.'

I tried to congratulate him, but it was now my turn to be weakly superstitious, and to perceive a kind of fatality in this affair. The truth of the matter was, that I could not bring myself to believe in Miss Lawson. There was a light in those brilliant hazel eyes that was not the radiance of a candid soul. I watched her closely after this conversation with John Marlow; and although her manner to him

was all that it should have been, I was secretly convinced that she had no real love for her affianced husband.

Whatever explanation arose between the lovers appeared satisfactory to my friend. He told me afterwards that Margaret had behaved with perfect candour. It was true that young Rawdon had made her an offer, but she had never in any manner encouraged his attentions or returned his affection. The affair had reached his father's ears through one of his sisters, Miss Lawson's pupils, and had resulted in his banishment from home; but the heart and mind of the governess had, according to her own account, been utterly unaffected.

My sisters were speedily informed of Miss Lawson's engagement, and were too good-natured to feel anything but pleasure on hearing the news; although, in their eyes, the age of the bridegroom entirely destroyed the romance of the courtship. Clara could not banish the recollection of Horace Rawdon, the absent traveller, who had gone on a trading expedition to the coast of Africa, hoping to enrich himself by that means.

'Margaret ought to have waited for his return,' said my sister. 'I know she was very much in love with him when she first came here, let her say what she will.'

In the second week in January Mr. Marlow left us to return to London in order to make all necessary arrangements for his marriage; but before bidding me good-bye at the station he invited me to join him in town at my earliest convenience. He had lodgings in the neighbourhood of Piccadilly, and ample accommodation for a visitor. Miss Lawson was to leave us a fortnight afterwards to return to her relations, who were eager to receive her now that she was about to make an advantageous marriage. Her uncle, Mr. Samuel Lawson, was a stockbroker, occupying a large, gaudily furnished house at Bayswater.

During the week following Marlow's departure I amused myself by watching Miss Lawson, in the interests of my friend. Every other morning's post brought her a letter from her lover, and several registered packets of jewelry gratified her during the course of the week; nor were Mr. Marlow's gifts by

any means trifling in value. I fancied, however, that she received these tributes very much as a matter of course; and on more than one occasion when she talked to me of my friend it seemed to me that she was more intent on obtaining information as to his position and resources in India than she was interested in my praises of his character and talents.

It was on my last morning at home that the post-bag brought Miss Lawson a foreign letter, the aspect of which caused her evident agitation. She did not open this epistle at the breakfast-table, and I thought that she looked at me somewhat anxiously as she slipped it into her pocket. She knew that I was going to spend the next week with her lover, and perhaps imagined that I should mention this letter.

I found John Marlow in excellent spirits. He was to be married early in March. He had sketched out his honeymoon tour on the Continent, and had taken a pretty furnished house at the West End to receive his young wife and him on their return to London in May.

'I shall give her all the pleasures and gaieties that a woman of her age has a right to enjoy,' he said. 'She shall have no occasion to regret having married a man twenty years her senior.'

'Tell me one thing, Marlow,' I said, seriously. 'You mean this to be a love-match, don't you? You wouldn't marry Margaret Lawson if you believed her influenced by your position and fortune, would you, old fellow?'

'I would not, Frank.'

'So help you heaven?'

'So help me heaven!' he answered as earnestly. 'I believe she loves me, Frank. If I did not think that, I would sooner cut my throat than marry her.'

'There are some men who think love comes after marriage,' I said presently.

'I am not one of those. I have received Margaret Lawson's assurance that she loves me; and I believe her from my soul. Have you anything to say against her, Frank?'

'Oh, nothing,' I replied hastily, rather alarmed by that somewhat tigerish ferocity with which a man over head and ears in love is accustomed to hear the

impeachment of his betrothed. I remembered that foreign letter, and the sudden flush which had overspread Miss Lawson's face as she received it, but I dared not mention the subject to my friend. It seemed so mean a thing to persist in doubting the lady, and the letter might be from any one in the world except that absent traveller, Horace Rawdon. I did, however, doubt this lady's truth almost in spite of myself, and listened to my friend's anticipations of happiness with secret misgiving. My visit to him was prolonged much beyond the week I had intended to devote to it. I dined at Bayswater with the Lawson family—a showy, ceremonial banquet; and I spent a good deal of my time with John Marlow and his affianced at picture galleries, theatres, and other places of entertainment.

I had occasion to cross the park one morning in the direction of Bayswater, on my way to call upon some friends in Hyde Park Gardens; and in one of the lonelier walks I was surprised to meet Miss Lawson. She was quite alone, and seemed, as I thought, not a little embarrassed by meeting me. I

knew that she had refused to attend a morning concert with Mr. Marlow that day, on the plea of particular business in the way of shopping, and was therefore disposed to wonder at finding her strolling idly here. She said something about an atrocious headache, which had obliged her to put off all business, and dismissed me, as I thought, rather impatiently.

My friends were not at home; and I recrossed the park within half an hour by another and longer route, taking the furthermost border of the Serpentine. Here, having no special occupation for the afternoon, I lingered to smoke a cigar, stretched at full length upon a bench by the side of the water. The day was mild for the season of the year, but the gardens were almost deserted at this time. I was roused from my reverie by a man's voice close at hand, saying loudly,—

'If you throw me over, Margaret, you will be as false and heartless a woman as ever breathed the breath of life. You know that I trusted implicitly in your promise to marry me whenever I came home to claim you, and you know that I have broken with

my family for ever in order to be true to you. I might have done well abroad had I been content to wait for success; but I could not endure life away from you, and I availed myself of the first opportunity that arose for my return. I have accepted a clerkship in a merchant's office, with a salary that will just enable us to live. It is no brilliant propect to offer you, Margaret; but it is better than the dependence of your position as a governess, and it is a life to be shared with a man you have professed to love.'

The answer to this speech escaped me. The speaker was walking slowly beside a lady on the other side of the noble horse-chestnut beneath which I was seated, completely screened by the massive trunk from these two promenaders. They walked a little way, and then returned. This time the lady was speaking, and I recognized the clear musical tones of Miss Lawson's voice.

'You know that I have always been true to you, Horace,' she said; 'but it was not the less foolish of you to come home. I was shocked by your imprudence when I received your letter from Marseilles.

Such a step will be sure to aggravate your father, and all your friends.'

'I thought you would be glad of my return Margaret.'

'Of course I am glad to see you; but I am sorry that your prospects should be sacrificed to such foolish impatience. We are both young enough to wait for a few years.'

Not a word of her engagement to John Marlow. They passed the tree again, returned, and then parted within a few paces of my seat.

'May I call upon you at your uncle's?'

'No, Horace; I dare not receive you there. I will write to you in a few days. I have run the risk of all kinds of annoyance in consenting to meet you to-day. My uncle and aunt are strait-laced and severe to a degree. Good-bye.'

'A brief meeting and a cold parting, Margaret. When shall I see you again?'

'Indeed I don't know. I will write to you.'

He kissed her, and let her go, very reluctantly, as it seemed to me in my place of concealment. I rose as Miss Lawson hurried away, and contrived to

meet the gentleman face to face. He was walking slowly along, swinging his cane to and fro, with a very moody countenance. He was a fine young fellow, with a handsome face bronzed by foreign suns.

I went back to my friend's lodgings sorely puzzled as to my line of conduct. It was evident that Margaret Lawson had deceived Marlow as to her relations with Horace Rawdon; but it did not appear to me that she meant to jilt the elder man. I had little doubt that the letter she was to write her old love would contain the intelligence of her approaching marriage with John Marlow. She had shrunk in a cowardly manner from telling young Rawdon a truth which she would not fear to communicate in a letter. It was his anger, not his pain she dreaded.

'She is just what I thought her,' I said to myself,—'selfish and cold-hearted to the last degree. I should dearly love to see her left in the lurch by both her suitors.'

On reflection, I decided that it was best to tell John Marlow the whole truth. He was likely

enough to detest me for my interference; but I was willing to suffer his dislike rather than that he should walk blindfold into a matrimonial snare for lack of fair warning. I found him reading his Indian letters, which the overland mail had just brought him.

'Another bank gone,' he said, 'the Calcutta Imperial.'

'Does that affect you?' I asked, anxiously.

'Personally to the extent of a few hundreds only, but I have many friends who will suffer.'

It struck me that this failure might be turned to some account as a trial of Miss Lawson's truth; but I said nothing about this to Marlow. I only told him, in the simplest manner, what I had heard that afternoon in Kensington Gardens.

John Marlow was deeply moved, but he said very little, and I saw how painfully weak-minded he was upon the subject. We were both to dine at Bayswater on the next evening, and I felt sure that he would take occasion to question his betrothed. He did not wait for the evening, however, but went early the following morning to call on Miss Lawson.

She was out with her aunt and cousins; and he came home looking ill, tired, and depressed. When the evening came he was too ill to dine out; and I went myself to carry his excuses and my own, about an hour before the dinner-hour.

Mr. Lawson was out; and on requesting to see his niece, I was ushered into the library, where the young lady came to me. I told her of Mr. Marlow's illness, and she received the news with evident uneasiness.

'It is very sudden, is it not?' she asked, looking at me in a searching manner.

'Yes, it is sudden. He seems to be suffering from a kind of low fever.'

'My uncle tells me there has been a great bank failure in Calcutta. I hope that does not affect Mr. Marlow?'

'Not to any great extent, I believe,' I replied with assumed hesitation, for I saw the young lady had already taken fright.

'But to some extent it does,' she answered quickly. 'Do you think it is anxiety that has made him ill?'

'He certainly does seem troubled in his mind; but his anxiety may not arise from business matters.'

'From what else could it arise?'

'You would be more likely to know that than I; for I am sure he has no secrets from you.'

'I hope not; I have a right to share his troubles.'

'I am glad to hear you say that,' I replied; 'I should be sorry for him if he were to win only a fair-weather wife.'

Miss Lawson charged me with all manner of affectionate messages for her betrothed, and I departed. My friend's illness lasted for some days, and even after his recovery the fever left him worn and pale.

'Frank,' he said to me on the first morning that we breakfasted together in the sitting-room, 'I am going to offer Miss Lawson her freedom, and I want you to be a witness of our interview. I have thought the subject out during my illness, and I trust I have come to the right way of thinking. I shall make no allusion to the meeting in the gardens, as I do not want to compromise you.'

I accompanied him to Mr. Lawson's house, and

was present throughout a scene which touched me deeply. My friend spoke with a noble simplicity, offering to release his betrothed, and imploring her to withdraw from her engagement unless she could give him her whole heart.

'I am twenty years your senior, Madge,' he said, 'and have nothing but my truth to commend me to you. Let us understand each other before it is too late. Nothing but misery could come to either of us from a loveless union.'

She looked at him with a curiously searching look, and hesitated a little before replying.

'You must have some hidden reason for this formal offer, John,' she said.

'It is not a formal offer; I have no reason but my desire to be secure in the possession of your heart.'

'Have you any cause to doubt me?'

'I cannot answer that question very precisely. There is such a thing as instinctive doubt. I know and feel my own demerits. Our engagement was a hasty one, and I want to give you a fair opportunity for withdrawal before it is too late. I entreat you to

be true to me, Margaret—to me and to yourself. But I do not want to hurry you; take time for reflection; let me see you again to-morrow at this time.'

Mr. Lawson came into the room as we were taking leave, and his niece had an opportunity for speaking to me alone while Mr. Marlow was talking to him.

'Your friend is looking very ill,' she said, anxiously; 'I fear this bank business must be a serious affair.'

'Yes,' I replied, with equal gravity; 'it means ruin—for the losers.'

She had no time to question me further, and I felt assured that her mystification was complete. She attributed her lover's offer entirely to a change in his circumstances, which he was not candid enough to explain.

He had not long to wait for his answer; it came by that evening's post. She had thought earnestly upon the subject, and was convinced that his offer to release her implied a doubt that was incompatible with perfect affection. It was best, therefore, that the

offer should be accepted, and that both should hold themselves free. This reply came upon John Marlow like a thunderclap. In spite of her duplicity with regard to her old engagement, he had to the last believed in Margaret Lawson's love for himself.

'You are right, Frank,' he said; 'I have only exposed myself to a second disappointment. I shall go back to India next month, and leave the ground clear for Horace Rawdon.'

'Whom she will jilt just as she has jilted you,' I replied. 'She will never consent to marry a clerk in a merchant's office; unless, indeed, the prospect of his future baronetcy should tempt her.'

The issue proved my guess correct. Miss Lawson married a merchant-prince whom she had met at her uncle's house, and whose budding attentions, taken in conjunction with the bank failure, had tempted her to the breaking of her engagement. This gentleman failed within six months of his marriage, and fled from his creditors, leaving his wife to exist as best she might on her earnings as a daily governess. This means of subsistence has, however, been augmented of late by an annuity of a hundred pounds

settled on her by an anonymous benefactor, whose name I know to be John Angus Marlow. My friend returned to India, where he is now an eminently prosperous man, but a confirmed bachelor, happy in the pursuit of his profession, and with no thought beyond it.

THE END.

J. AND W. RIDER, PRINTERS, LONDON.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY
Los Angeles
This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

Form L9–50*m*-4,'61(B8994s4)444

PR
4989 Maxwell -
M33w Weavers and weft
1877

PR
4989
M33w
1877

THE LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES